Hope for Survival: The History and Decline of Palestinian Christianity

Author: Craig Andrew Noyes

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Craig Noyes
Boston College
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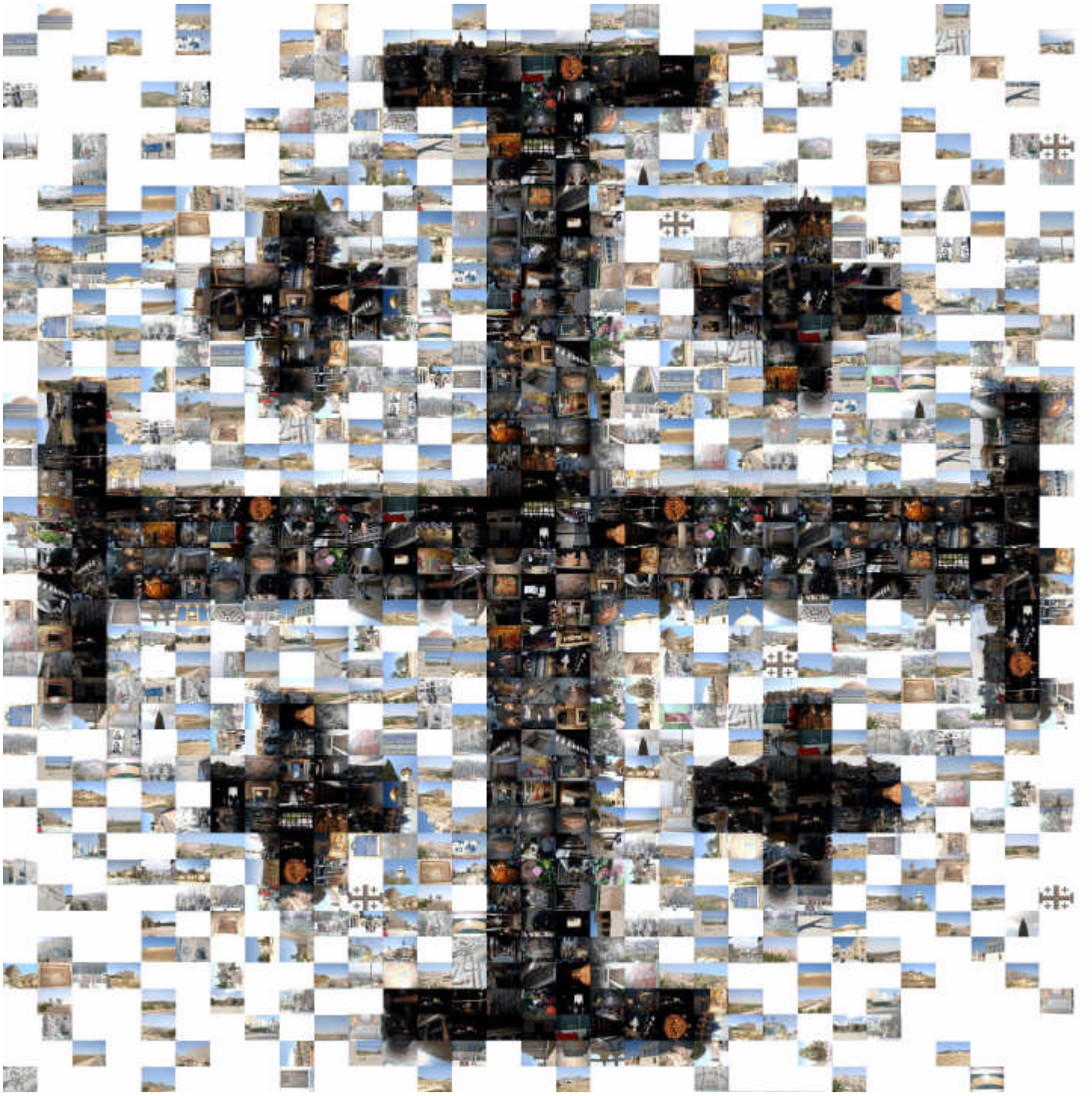

For Dad

You are the consummate officer, gentleman, father, and human
Your enthusiastic interest in my pursuits has driven me
I hope this would have made you proud

I think as they say, ‘hope is the last to die.’ So there is always hope and, actually, only the hope is keeping us here in the land and continuing our ministry through the people. Not only [to] the Christians, but to our people living here in this time. – *Reverend Na’el Abu Rahmoun*

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Prologue

I heard our names pronounced in a thick Hebrew accent over the public announcement system and slowly trudged over to the gate counter. Twenty minutes ago we were told by an El Al representative that we could expect to be called back for some "basic security questions" before boarding the flight to Tel Aviv. Not at all surprised by this, I thought nothing of the scenario, walked over to the waiting area, sat down, and tried to rest my eyes.

The first feelings of suspicion and concern entered my head when two security officials took our passports and then quickly separated me from my travel companion. Though I had managed the vast majority of trip planning and logistics for our 10-day trip to Israel and the region of Palestine, the future of our sojourn was suddenly thrown into the hands of two security officials serving at the pleasure of El Al and- to a greater extent- the Israeli state.

Nothing more than a clear glass divider separated me from Claire and the rest of the people going about their business in Terminal C at Rome's Leonardo da Vinci Airport. Nevertheless, for the next fifty minutes I felt completely isolated and confined. My interrogator was a very stern, stone-faced woman who couldn't have been older than thirty. Cleanly dressed, sharp, assertive in her speech and thorough in her questioning, she began a campaign of circular questioning about our identities, where we came from, our intentions while in Israel, how we procured money to finance

our trip, who we were going to meet with, where we were going to be staying, and how we were traveling throughout the country. Before I had the chance to notice, twenty minutes had passed and she excused herself to talk with the agent meeting with Claire. No doubt they were comparing our answers and attempting to identify any inconsistencies in what we said.

I honestly thought that it was a fairly comical affair. I softly chuckled. 'It's absurd that they are expending this much time and energy trying to catch two white, American students in the act of international terrorism! What do they even think we are capable of?!' The thought of us as conspirators was ridiculous! But more than anything, I was upset that we were being denied an opportunity to catch up on some rest and prevent the full effects of jet lag by the time we got to our final destination. 'Well, I hope they're happy. They caught both of us after an eight and a half hour flight from JFK. We're overtired and thinking it is late at night. What's more, we're still getting used to real airport security outside the U.S.!' After reassuring my perspective and thinking about the absurdity of the whole exercise, I had a naïve, cocky air when my interrogator returned to continue questioning me.

For the most part the questions from earlier were repeated, though they were more thorough and in depth this time around. More emphasis was placed on the "status" of my relationship with Claire. Although Claire and I agreed before leaving that when this interrogation was to take place our answers were to *always* match- we were classmates from college who were visiting the Holy Land to visit the Christian holy places- I began to doubt Claire's resilience to this questioning. Did she say something different? Did she admit that we were in a relationship? How would they interpret that? Or even worse, did she tell them that we were, in fact, going to be in daily contact with Palestinians? Did they find out that we were going to be doing research and conducting interviews throughout Israel, Jerusalem, and the West Bank?

While the interrogation continued and I was commanded to show proof of our hotel reservations, contacts in the country, and any material I had read or studied about the state of Israel, fearful questions began to slowly pepper my thoughts. I remembered the stories I heard from friends and fellow students. I recalled hearing about students who intended to study in Israel but were- instead- interrogated, denied entrance into the country, and then simply told which flight they were going to be returning to the United States on.

Relax. Breathe.

No. That couldn't happen. That's ridiculous. Those were the kind of stories that never had a source. They were passed down from a friend who knew a friend who knew someone's roommate. Anyway, even if that did happen, those students were asking for it or were much more suspicious than Claire and I. They were wearing "Free Palestine" t-shirts while boarding an El Al flight and spouting quotes from U.N. resolutions. They were instigators. We are showing nothing but respect! We are fully cooperating. I am answering all of the questions with slow, annunciated, complete pieces of information. I am making sure that I keep eye contact with her, even as she leans over the table and points at me as the questions get increasingly presumptuous, fear-based, and seemingly paranoid.

But what if?

I can't even see my passport. They control who gets on and off the airplane. They hold all the cards and I don't even think I have any chips. All of a sudden I realize that the legitimacy of my rationale was thrown out the window nearly an hour ago. The reasoned confidence that I once had was suddenly eclipsed by increasingly powerful emotional reactions to the events swirling around me. Words began to stumble off my tongue. I was speaking faster than before. Why was she constantly asking me how I got money for this trip?! What does it matter that this is my first time in Israel?! Shouldn't you be welcoming me with open arms?!

The interrogation is paused for a third time in order to compare our answers again. I notice that I am constantly shifting my weight from one leg to another and that my right knee consistently shakes no matter what I do. Though I'm somewhat impressed with how little my hands are shaking, it's not enough for me to get over how much I could use a glass of water or a chair. The flight attendants walk up the gate from the plane and I see that they are prepared for boarding. One of the tall male flight attendants and a short, rather attractive blond flight attendant (I didn't expect that color hair on an El Al flight) slowly approach the table that I am standing at and nod hello.

"So what did you do?" the woman said with a big smile.

I let out a quick chuckle and replied, "I don't know. Just hoping to get on the flight."

"I've never seen someone asked so many questions." Her smile quickly vanished and it was as though her face gave away a certain uneasiness that entered into her mind.

I didn't even know how to begin to respond to the question, let alone the emotions that were painted on her face. I simply smiled and shrugged my shoulders. The onslaught of fears, doubts, and questions that were marching through my head was unlike anything I had experienced before in my life. Simply put, I couldn't begin to fathom why I, *I*, would be suspected to be a threat.

I felt that I had studied enough about the region, its history, and its people to appreciate the reactionary, highly-emotional decisions that dictated the modern political landscape of the Middle East. I understood the need for security that made our TSA look like kids dressed up as cowboys on Halloween. I was aware of the constant state of suspicious alertness that existed in the Middle East.

But why me? The assumption that I wouldn't be seriously suspected was a remarkably telling indication of how much I had to learn. How much I had to experience. How much I couldn't even begin to grasp or know for myself.

My interrogator soon returned and told me to follow her. The glass door opens and I am reunited with Claire as we follow the security officials towards a door that says "Authorized

Personnel Only" in both English and Italian. Quickly I realize that the four of us are not alone. In fact, there are three other civilians and an additional security official with us. I can only assume that they are trying to get on the same flight as us.

My crash course education in the psyche of the region is enriched when I realize that one of us- *the suspected*- is a male Hasidic Jew that couldn't be more than 17 years old. We filed into a closed off hallway and waited silently for the elevator door to open. It arrives. We step in. The door closed and I feel that we are going down. As I stand in the elevator- holding my carry-on luggage- I look down and realize that my right hand is noticeably shaking as it rests on my bag. Slowly looking up, I notice that my interrogator is looking at my hand. Her eyes suddenly dart to my face and even though I want to just collapse in fearful and paranoid exhaustion I made sure that I maintained eye contact with her. Would looking away imply guilt?

But then something completely unexpected happened just as the elevator stopped descending. She gave the slightest grin as she continued looking at me. It was not a smile. It wasn't big enough to warrant such a distinction. But what struck me was that it was seemingly devoid of malice, suspicion, fear, or anger. The incredibly suspicious, uncompromising, often scowling women who had succeeded in making me feel as though I had no right to be entering her country suddenly granted me the privilege of seeing a soft, human side. Though I will never know what she was truly thinking, I felt as though she was saying to me, 'You're okay. Just this one more thing.' The broad spectrum of emotion did not simply exist in that moment. It was felt in its entirety and was spanned in a matter of seconds.

When the elevator door opened we walked down another hallway and through a pair of double doors that led out onto the tarmac. The hot, humid air hit me and I immediately wished that I could take out my sunglasses for our little gallivant. I saw the El Al 737 waiting to the right as we turned left and approached a luggage carrier. Our checked luggage was placed recklessly on its

base. The next few minutes were altogether ridiculous, surreal, comical, and remarkable. The event was nothing short of an epiphany. It was an education of the other in its truest sense.

We all pulled our luggage off the carrier and went through it with the security officials. I lifted every piece of clothing I had and explained every bottle in my toiletries kit. I watched as one of the officials pulled shreds of newspaper out of a dilapidated cardboard box and intently examined the empty transparent plastic drawers of a Tupperware organizing unit that was probably bought at Bed Bath and Beyond. I laughed but then pitied the teenage boy as he attempted to rummage through his massive luggage. He quickly found that he had to hold his shtofener in place as he leaned into the suitcase to pull out its contents, or else it would continually tumble off his head. He pulled a box of Fruity Pebbles cereal out of his luggage and set it down on the ground as he continued to display his innocence.

My fascination in what seemed to me an infringement of personal property rights was downplayed by my shock in the way my interrogator was acting now that she had seen that my underwear was clean and neatly folded. She maintained her inquisitive nature, but it took on a friendly, welcoming character.

"So where are you going?"

I wanted to scream, "*Like you don't already know!*"

But she continued her genuinely interested questioning with questions like, "Will you have time to go to Tel Aviv?", "Do you like to go out to clubs?", and suggestions on where to visit, shop, and see what Israel is really like. I attempted to reciprocate her interest in our trip by asking about her job, how often she got to travel, how long she had been in Rome, and when she would be able to return home.

The walk back to the terminal, ride up the elevator, and procession back to the gate was entirely non-eventful. We were quickly ushered through the gate, received our passports, and boarded the plane. We were bound for Israel.

* * *

"Could you explain to us how you are affected by the Separation Wall and the checkpoints?"

"I mean, you traveled- did you get through the airport security?"

"Yes."

"Was it easy?"

I quickly summarized our experience in Rome and noted that we were "interrogated pretty intensely for about 45 minutes." Omar's face was painted with an ironic grin as he began to talk.

"Just imagine, if it was the 45 minutes that you say- it was long? I go through three checkpoints everyday. And each takes me at least one hour to cross the checkpoint. So imagine having to go through this three times a day. And I work five days a week but on Saturdays- my grandmother is sick- and we take turns. So Saturday's my day, so it's six days- I go through the checkpoints. And Sunday, let's say we want to go out of the house, we have to go through the checkpoints. So, just to talk about the checkpoints- it's not the humiliation and it's not everything else. It's just going in the same hassle that you went through for 45 minutes, I'm going through it three times. Not me. I mean, it's more than one million Palestinians everyday. So I mean, you might get a small feeling from it. At least, I'm sure they were polite and they were speaking polite." He noted that our interrogators "were not making body movements like this," as he violently threw his arms around in the air.

"So I mean, maybe this will give you an idea- small idea."

Omar's comments humbled me in a way I had never experienced. With absolute sincerity, heart-felt emotion, and remarkable cognizance he was able to convey the relativity of our life

experiences with a small amount of words. There was no resentment when he emphasized those last two words- “small idea.” His human spirit and struggle came across in that moment.

“I mean, I could say it all- the humiliation and everything- but just for you to relate, if it’s a memory that is fresh in your mind.”

He paused just long enough for his words to echo.

“*This is how it is.*”

Introduction

At the crossroads of three continents there lies a region where the Abrahamic religions were manifested. In a nearly poetic fashion, the landscape offers a geographic representation of the human history that has been lived on its soil. A guest to these expanses in the Holy Land does not need to go far to find some of the most remarkable scenery in existence. There are majestic snow capped peaks to the north, rolling folds of arid ground that can easily disorient and more easily seduce, the lowest valley on earth and the most saline body of water known in human history, lush, fertile plains to the west, and a humid blanket of Mediterranean air on the coast. Here, the earth is not timid to show its varied possibilities of geography. It is fitting that an area with such simultaneously beautiful, rugged, majestic, dangerous, exotic, seductive, and treacherous landscapes would also be home to myriad communities of beautiful nature and disturbing contention.

All indigenous human communities of the region have contributed to and have been influenced by its diverse nature. The Christian communities of Palestine have been no exception to this rule. The status of Christianity in the place of its Messiah's birth has been influenced by many inter-religious, ethnic, political, social, economic, and strategic phenomena. The character of the religion, its values and theology, the choices of its population, and the external influences of its neighbors have been the most defining aspects of Christian history in Palestine.

The region has been influenced by innumerable forces throughout history and its name has changed many times. Yet ever since the life of Jesus and the acts of Paul, there has been a Christian presence in the one hundred fifty mile stretch of land on the east coast of the Mediterranean that has been called Palestine. Christians have populated the towns of his life and have actively preserved their holy places. They have proselytized their religion, built their communities, pursued their faith, and followed their religion. Two millennia after the life of the Jesus, there remains a strong, proud bond between the Christian populations in the Holy Land; this link is their religious commonality.

They know themselves to be the "living stones of the church;" it is as though their individual lives are holy relics. The Christian population appreciates how unique they are in the history of Christianity. Their consciousness of their faith and history defines their identity. They know themselves to be the Christian populace that is the closest and most intimately connected to the life, land, and legacy of Christ. There is often a profound appreciation for the symbolism as well as the religious-political influence of their presence in the place of Jesus' life. This heightened consciousness of their religious identity has often driven their social, economic, cultural, and political actions.

However, the remaining Christian population is currently in a precarious situation that seriously threatens the sustainability of their presence in the region of Palestine. The history of Christians' survival, interaction, and participation in the environment of the region is complex, and there is now an ever diminishing populace linked to the life of Jesus. Perhaps the greatest threat to the Christian population today originates from a crisis of identity. The residual Christian population most certainly knows its religious identity. However, their proud embrace of faith and history may be most detrimental to their survival.

Memory is one of the most powerful defining aspects of identity in the Middle East. Events from previous millennia influence the actions of individuals today. Battles from centuries past are

remembered with great fervor. Family migration is traced with remarkable accuracy. Refugees still carry keys to homes that were lost decades earlier. There is passion in the voice of anyone who responds to a question about their past. Yet while memory enriches one's identity and contributes to the social and cultural fabric of the region, it also inhibits the populations' abilities to progress, reform, and innovate. When one's life is focused on prophets from centuries past or one's purpose is to commemorate or reconcile wrongs done to ancestors and deceased relatives, a person loses their ability to look forward.

The Palestinian Christian population is caught in this precarious situation. There is a highly conservative, preservationist attitude that permeates the Christian population in the Holy Land. It lacks the ideology necessary to mobilize forward thinking, progressive political entities. There is such a strong emphasis on the faith aspect of their religion that an aversion to political activism has developed. Throughout the course of the past century, this has seriously hindered the population's influence. As other religious groups have mobilized their political assets, Christians for the most part have been left by the way side.

Simultaneously, the Palestinian Christian population has been struggling with the rise of ethnic and nationalist movements that have dominated the twentieth century. There is a daily struggle to determine, understand, and accept the national identities that rose during the fall of the Ottoman Empire and beyond. The Palestinian Christians' link to the Arab population- through the ethnic label of "Palestinian"- has caused myriad conflicts and tensions. They continue to live as minorities within this context, as most of the Palestinian community is Muslim.

As descendants of the Canaanites, Philistines, and ancient Hebrew tradition, Palestinians share an illustrious history and a fundamental place of origin that could potentially bind them as a prosperous and legitimately unified nation. The peoples tied to Palestinian blood have practiced Judaism in their history. A great number of them converted to Christianity, as well. A vast

majority submitted to Islam when Arab tribes, spreading the word of the prophet Muhammad, traveled out of the Arabian Peninsula at the end of the seventh century. The dominant influence of Muslim identity- throughout the eras of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs, the fracturing of the Islamic World, and the hegemony of the Ottoman Empire- summarily affected the peoples of the Levant and the region of Palestine. Nevertheless, a sizeable portion of the Palestinian population maintained their Christian faith throughout the centuries.

There is evidence, meanwhile, that institutional segregation, prejudice, and contempt for non-Muslims has developed within the Islamic World. This is an incredibly important subject to examine when studying any Christian population in the region. Islam has dominated the Middle East as a majority power for nearly fourteen hundred years and it has influenced most of Christian history there, as well. People of the Book have not been left out of the persecution. In fact, throughout history there have been many institutions and programs that have specifically targeted Christians and Jews. From the jizya tax to the Ottoman devshirme system to the concepts of Dhimmitude, there have been efforts to compartmentalize society, create hierarchies, exploit non-Muslims, and silence the voices of minorities in the Islamic World. While many have come to believe that such religious-based concepts and institutions have disappeared with the implementation of the secular, nation-state model to the Middle East in the past century, there is great error in this notion. Political institutions based on the Islamic system maintained hegemony over the region for nearly fourteen hundred years. To suppose that the rapid implementation of secular principles in the course of decades can reverse over a millennium of engrained concepts is naïve.

Learned societal concepts of hierarchy are magnificently difficult to break. Ideology derived from principles engrained in religious dogma offer even greater challenges. For this reason, the Islamic institutions that are examined early in this work have great influence on the Muslim

societies in existence today. Although there may exist secular institutions in predominantly Muslim nations today, make no mistake. Concepts of Dhimmitude and hierarchy are active in the political, economic, and social realms today. To dismiss such notions as archaic and anachronistic is similar to the dismissal of race relation issues in the United States in the twentieth century because of one hundred forty years old emancipation and forty years old civil rights legislation.

It is important to note that this work will not engage the debate about whether such institutions are in the true spirit and faith of Islam. However, it would be remiss if it were not to investigate the sources of such methods that marginalize and threaten non-Muslim populations. For this reason, efforts will be taken to examine the Qur'an and many sources of Islamic political philosophy. The purpose of this exercise will be to understand how such institutions could have developed under Islam and, furthermore, how they are supported (either implicitly or directly) by Islamic theology.

After examining the institutions that most greatly effect the Palestinian Christian population and its interaction with its neighbors, it is necessary to study how they influence the population's perception of itself and its position in the world. The Palestinian Christian population, as a whole today, can be characterized as a highly victimized community that is influenced by the traumas it has experienced throughout the centuries. They have been influenced by various institutions, political philosophies, and historical events that have left them unified in their devotion to their faith and yet disjointed in their political voice. Today, many voices in the Palestinian Christian population indicate the traumas that they continue to live with and that define their identities. Their opinions and perceptions of their neighbors indicate symptoms that are not dissimilar from Stockholm syndrome. There are examples of identity guilt as well as efforts to rationalize their treatment and the institutions that have inhibited their prosperity. An understanding of the Christian

psyche in the Holy Land is essential. Without it, one is unable to comprehend the actions of the residual population or appreciate the gravity of their situation.

The Christian Palestinian population has been struggling for equity, parity, and peaceful coexistence with its neighbors for centuries. Examining the institutions of Dhimmitude, millets, and other Islamic political institutions uncovers the systemic barriers of inter-religious coexistence and peace. These legacies continue to affect the Christian Palestinian population to this day, as the ghosts of these prejudices continue to influence societal interactions with a subtle yet incredibly pervasive nature.

While the past century introduced more secular, liberal, democratic institutions to the region of Palestine, there are indications that minority populations like the Christians have been and will continue to be marginalized. By the turn of the 20th century there was a crisis of identity brewing in the region of Palestine; it was part of a greater regional crisis that simultaneously influenced the smaller Palestinian Christian population. Over the course of decades, the influential rhetoric of pan-Arab, pan-Turkish, and pan-Islamic movements interfered with the ability to accurately perceive the identity of minority populations within the Middle East. Such movements were developed as reactions to growing European influence in the region, the fracturing of Middle Eastern unities and dominance, as well as the collective nostalgia of past Islamic World hegemony and brilliance in all avenues of culture, religion, politics, and education. However, these movements also allowed many to dismiss the complex cultural breath and beauty of myriad Middle Eastern ethno-religious groups.

As a product of this greater crisis of identity, the Palestinian identity is a significant dilemma today and it affects their national identity, pursuit of legitimate unity, and the greater Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Within this ethnic community, the minority Christian population had to reconcile their identity, their treatment, and how they would participate in the new system. The Palestinian Christian population eventually sought a Palestinian nationalist movement in the years

preceding and following 1967. Their commitment to such nationalist movement came to define their community's survival for the remainder of the century.

The Christian leaders from various churches and varying sects struggled to establish their place in an evolving Palestinian national identity. This was a monumental task, as there are many cultural, ethnic, and religious variables that affect Palestinian identity. Furthermore, there were many economic barriers and prejudices within the Palestinian population, among Palestinian territory inhabitants, Palestinians living in the state of Israel, and the refugee populations displaced in neighboring Arab countries.

The unifying identity of the Palestinians, and the development of organizations that claimed to represent the will of the Palestinian national cause, were new developments at this time. As mentioned earlier, Palestinian Christians were players in initiating the national movement throughout the 1950's and 1960's. They had the ability to anticipate the failure of pan-Arab movements, developed through Nasser and illustrated by such phenomena as the Syrian-Egyptian formation of the United Arab Republic. In addition, they facilitated the dissemination of an identity that would include Christians and non-Arabs alike. They attempted to recognize a common history, culture, and ethnic bond in order to successfully bind a greater portion of the Palestinian population in the region together. Their efforts are echoed today, as some Palestinians - specifically Christian Israeli Palestinians- are reviving "Hebrew" Canaanism for their own conception of a new Palestine.

However, the continued emphasis on Muslim identity within the Middle East has greatly diminished the goal that nationalists like the Palestinian Christians sought with their movements. The second half of the 20th century witnessed increased Muslim fervor and exclusivity in the Palestinian community. The influence of Islamic identity has directly challenged the broader, historical concept of Palestinian identity that includes the greater Palestinian community. Islamists and religious fundamentalists have sought to alter- and in many cases, pervert- the Palestinian

national identity into a concept that is coterminous with Islam. As the greater Palestinian national identity- including the historical bond with Canaanites, Philistines, and the faiths of Judaism and Christianity- bares its roots in *al-jahiliyya* (the age of ignorance, predating Islam), it is diametrically opposed to an identity rooted in Islam.

It is no surprise that the Palestinian Christians have been marginalized, discriminated against, and treated as minorities within a majority population. However, the irony is outstanding, as the Christian population has contributed significantly to the Palestinian identity from its first converts to the national movement in the 20th century. What was once a vibrant, significant, and highly engaged percentage of the Palestinian population is now being silenced, politically slighted, and often forced (directly and indirectly) to leave their homes in Palestine. This predicament is an enormous tragedy for the ethno-religious and cultural identity of Palestine. It is also a crisis for the political future of the entire Palestinian population.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Christian population's decision to ally with the ethnically based Palestinian identity has put them at odds with the Israeli state. The coalition with their Muslim neighbors has perpetuated Palestinian Christian hostility towards Jews and Israel. As such, the Christian population living in the Palestinian territories has bared the brunt of the negative developments throughout the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The population in the West Bank has suffered unemployment, limited mobility, human rights violations, and continued violence. They have dealt with their Palestinian identity and its implications by having to register with the Israel Defense Force and wait at checkpoints. They have been relocated in certain towns to allow for the construction of the Security Fence. Meanwhile, in Israel, Christians have complained about treatment in job searches because of their religion and their decisions to abstain from service in the military.

Today, the Palestinian Christian population faces tremendous challenges from highly varied and numerous sources. While the community is bound by a great pride in their faith and connection to the birthplace of their religion, the number of different denominations and sects has inhibited the population from uniting as a single entity. Meanwhile, there is a general aversion from mobilizing Christian political parties or lobbying for Christian rights and identity. Surveys sponsored by church related organizations in Palestine find that most Christians are displeased with the level of their churches' civic engagement. There have been multiple scandals in recent years related to church property and land sales; some of the most high profile incidents have occurred in Jerusalem and Nazareth. Meanwhile, there are documented cases of Christians being marginalized in municipal politics and intimidated regularly in Bethlehem.

Amid all of the issues influencing the contemporary Palestinian Christian population, there is a growing frustration and feeling of disconnect from the rest of Christendom; this correlates with the greater identity crisis that was mentioned earlier. Many Christians in the Holy Land have vocalized anger towards the world's Christian community and are aggravated with its lack of engagement in their preservation and survival. A feeling has begun to percolate in Palestine that while their indigenous population can not survive with Christendom, Christendom can survive without their presence in the Holy Land. Many of the "living stones of the church" fear that they are seen as superfluous and the holy places will survive without them.

Meanwhile, much of the Palestinian Christian population hopes for aid from Christendom and the greater world community. The sentiments of empathy, compassion, and service have roots in the Christian faith. Yet one must also recognize that such beliefs and feelings of entitled aid can also be linked to the psyche of the victim. Caught in a degrading situation with minimal opportunities to reverse the trend, many Christians feel that aid is required. In such a situation,

emigration has become an increasingly used option. Christian emigration from Palestine has increased for years and is the most direct cause to the diminishing population in the Holy Land.

* * *

The Palestinian Christian population sees its history and its faith as the greatest defining aspects of its identity. And yet, memory in the region is what limits the ability for progress, cooperation, and heterogeneous prosperity. Religion has tremendous influence on one's identity, treatment, potential, and even rights in the region. Such distinctions are far more exclusive than inclusive. As such, any minority faces great challenges in order to attain equality and parity in all aspects of life. The history and current status of the Christian population in Palestine offers a fascinating glimpse at this reality.

On its most fundamental level, this work is an attempt by its author to examine the rich history of the Christian population in Palestine. Its main focus will be Christianity's interaction with other religions and institutions that influence group dynamics. The work will examine the history of the Christian population in the Holy Land, its influence, and how it has been defined by myriad powers outside of its community. The reader will discover the long, illustrious presence of Christianity in the Holy Land. Meanwhile, efforts will be made to convey how decisions made by the community, as well as outside forces, have defined their history. Today, the Christian population is dwindling in the Holy Land and the world watches as Palestinian Christians emigrate, assimilate, or die. The decrease in the Christian population has been a reality for a long time; without a drastic change in events, there is every reason the trend will continue. Yet perhaps the most humbling and fascinating attribute of Christians in Palestine is the unfaltering faith in God's good will and the hope for a brighter future. This perspective has allowed for strength in moments of horrendous grief; however, its dogmatic confidence could potentially prove to be the population's downfall in the hills, valleys, and plains where Jesus once walked.

Chapter One:
Christian Roots and the Holy Land

There are innumerable narratives that can be traced back the eastern shores of the Mediterranean and the rolling earth of the Levant. One of the most influential of these began with the life of Jesus. His life and teachings have been followed by billions over the course of two millennia. The writings of his disciples and followers were compiled into the New Testament, establishing a new era of religious, dogmatic principles that would shape the course of human history. The religion of Christianity arose from his life, crucifixion, and the story of his resurrection. Christendom grew over the course of centuries as proselytizing, conquest, and preaching aided its increased influence over the Mediterranean, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Christianity influenced myriad ethnicities, cultures, and societies in just as many ways. It is no surprise, then, that the history of the Christians indigenous to the region of Jesus' life would have a unique narrative that offered fascinating insights and startling trends.

In the Holy Land and the region known as Palestine, Christians participate in a remarkably diverse community of faith. Ironically, those inhabiting the lands in closest proximity to their Messiah's home are some of the most conflicted, dichotomous, and frictional communities within the immense spectrum of Christians. History has shown that since the beginning of Christianity, the populace in the region participated in dramatic quarrels over theology and identity. Their conflicts

and disunity would define the future of their religious population, just as any foundation determines the support of the structure that is to be built. The formation of Christian identity and community in Palestine faltered from its inception. For this reason, it would be haunted by a lack of commonalities, strength, and cooperation. Being an extremely difficult trend to alter, this fragmentation of Christianity in Palestine embedded itself into the fabric of the peoples there and became a pervasive marker in their identity.

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In the years following the death of Jesus, his followers proselytized and spread his teachings throughout the region. However, this was not done without persecution. The community of Christians was challenged immediately by communities of other faiths. In an era when religious identity determined allies, foes, and security, such realities were not exceptional. One of the most famous prosecutors of Christians, according to the New Testament, is Saul of Tarsus. According to the book of Acts, he was known to be a staunch persecutor of Jesus' followers. He actively tracked Christians, going "to the high priest and [asking] for letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, that would authorize him to arrest and take to Jerusalem any followers of the Way, men or women, that he might find (Acts 9:1-2)."[1]

Saul of the New Testament is representative of the hostile reception that met a number of Christians upon their baptism in the new faith. His intentions were well known, and feared, by Ananias in Damascus, just as the actions of prosecutors were known by the greater Christian community. Threats to the Christian followers came from different sources, including the indigenous Jewish population. The new covenant of Jesus directly challenged the Hebrew Bible and Hebrew theology. As such, there were many who feared the growing popularity and influence

[1] *The New Jerusalem Bible*. New York: Doubleday, 1990. pg. 1284.

of Jesus' teachings. The multiple plots to assassinate Paul, after his conversion, are theological examples of the very real tension that affected Christians at the time.[2]

Despite initial threats and challenges to the spread of Christianity, the new religion's political and theological centers arose in different locales through the region. The communities in the region around Galilee, within Palestine, boasted large levels of interaction and exchange, for example. Within years of Jesus' crucifixion, the peoples in and around Nazareth acted as active proselytizers of the Christian faith. They spread its influence south through the plains and the high hills around Jerusalem, as well as east through the Jordan Valley.[3] The region east of the Dead Sea became an area of tremendous success for the proselytizers as they melded the Christian faith with other traditions known by the indigenous Semitic people.[4]

The Galileans spread the teachings of Jesus and his followers through the language of Aramaic. Their vocative fervor was noticed by Julius Africanus towards the end of the second century A.D. However, their prominence would wane in the following 300 years. Falling victim to their geographic location, they became marginalized and silenced. They resided on the approximate border between the two theologies – Monophysites versus Orthodox consubstantiation – and failed to garner allies. They were always too close to opponents and were never able to establish loyal relationships with either side.

Meanwhile, from the initial decades following the death of Jesus through the beginning of the seventh century, Christianity grew to greatly influence a large track of land. From communities in Egypt, lining the Nile River, through the Levant and Mesopotamia, Christians established themselves in power.[5] Three religious-political centers arose in Alexandria in the Nile Delta, Antioch in the northwest Levant, and in the Roman city of Constantinople. The patriarchates there

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[2] Ibid. pg. 1284.
[3] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 36.
[4] Ibid. pg. 37.
[5] Pacini, Andrea. ed. *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. pg. 30,31.

held sway over the growing Christian communities and helped disseminate theological dogmas, political proclamations, and cultural precedents. Proselytizing was most successful and efficient in the more urban settings, and these patriarchates mirrored the spread of Christianity that was occurring in large population centers throughout the region.

As they garnered new believers, Church institutions, places of worship, and clergy would be installed to support the local population. The local, grass root character of Christian evangelism allowed different languages to adopt the faith and translate its word.[6] For example, the New Testament was translated into northern Aramaic by the second century A.D. and into Syriac and Coptic not long after the first. By the fifth century, an Armenian alphabet was developed and the Bible was successfully transmitted in text to that language's respective population.[7] While such actions made for ease of transmission, it also lent an ethnic character to the faith within specific communities. Rather than adopting an entirely new identity (and language) through faith, they assimilated Christianity into their existing cultures. Implications of these actions would affect Eastern Christianity to this day.

At the same time, meanwhile, Christian influence in the land of Jesus' life grew steadily. Moreover, the Holy Land was growing in importance and political influence. While Antioch and Alexandria served as the two most powerful patriarchates in the region, Bishop Cyril in Jerusalem was able to elevate the status the city's clergy, theology, and populace during his tenure in the mid-to-late fourth century A.D. His efforts paid off when the city gained status as a patriarchate in 451.[8]

Yet by the turn of the fourth century, contentious debates were becoming divisive within the greater Christian community. By that time, peoples of varying ethnicities, languages, and cultural traditions were adopting the teachings and ways of Jesus; it was a testament to the broad appeal and

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[6] Ibid. pg. 94.
[7] Ibid. pg. 101.
[8] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 43.

sound theology of the new covenant. Nevertheless, the inevitable product of heterogeneous religious communities – and any community, for that matter – is inconsistency and differing beliefs within the body of believers. History leaves indelible marks on the memory of peoples. Events in the lives of communities etch permanent characteristics into the surface of their identities. It makes the pure adoption of new thought systems monumentally difficult. In fact, it makes the process of assimilation necessary. That is, the synthesis of previously held beliefs with new, alternative – yet moldable – theories is the nature of rational beings with memory. While the option of radical reeducation and forced historical amnesia has been attempted at many points in history, it is exactly what its name implies: forced. It is unnatural within the realm of incrementally-built memory. It is an erasure of previously held identity and history.

Due to the growing conflicts within the Christian realm, a series of councils was held by clergy and thinkers within the religion. The goal of these assemblies was to solidify Christian theology. It was believed that a cohesive belief system would develop Christian alliances, cooperation, and unity. It also benefited the religion, for it suffered from a complex and sometimes contradictory theology that required clarification. Over a span of approximately 125 years, four councils were held throughout the region in which Christianity held sway. They were monitored by the Roman Emperor and were held within the bounds of the Empire's purview; in 313 A.D. – twelve years before the first council – Emperor Constantine recognized Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire.[9]

While the councils did succeed in establishing the theology of the Church patriarchate centered in Rome, it failed to unify the entire community of believers. By the end of council of Nicaea in 325, disagreements about some of the most fundamental principles of Christianity threatened to fragment the Church. Specifically, there was tremendous debate over the relationship

[9] Pacini, Andrea. ed. *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. pg. 31.

between Jesus and God. The Nicaean council proclaimed the concept of consubstantiation – the son of God was of the same substance and holy level – to be the established belief of Christianity. However, a substantial portion of Christians, particularly those residing in the Levant and North Africa, believed that as God's begotten son, Jesus was beneath and separate from the Holy Spirit.[10] This disconnect in the concept of the Holy Trinity ran in the face of the council's intentions. It also seriously challenged consubstantiation and the council of Nicaea because of its prominence and popularity among a substantial portion of Christian followers.

Basic notions of Jesus' divinity were continually challenged in the coming decades. After the sudden death of Arius, one of the Alexandrian priests heading the challenge, his followers were quieted. However, new non-Orthodox schools of theology continued the debate. The followers of Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople from 428 through 431, also confirmed Christ to be a human and, furthermore, refused to recognize Mary as the "Mother of God."[11] The Nestorians, therefore, were proclaimed to be heretical by the council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. and Nestorius was removed from the Patriarchate.

As different perceptions of Jesus' substance were polarized, new schools were developed that touted ever more extreme notions. In the middle of the fifth century, under the auspices of Emperor Theodosius II, the "Robber Council of Ephesus" established a view of Jesus that essentially denied that Jesus was human at all. Amongst rumors that clergy were extorted and threatened, the council emphasized the Monophysist principle that Jesus was of a singular and altogether divine nature.[12] Although the Monophysites were eventually condemned by Orthodox councils, its form of Christianity held sway in the Levant, was largely popular among believers throughout the region, and became the dominant theology of the Church of Egypt.

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[10] Betts, Robert Brenton. *Christians in the Arab East*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975. pg. 3.
[11] Ibid. pg. 3.
[12] Ibid. pg. 4.

The split in adopted theologies also served as a reason for continued clashes between ethnicities. Greeks, Copts, and Syriac-speaking Arameans perpetuated previous disputes under the guise- legitimate or otherwise- of the theological contest. The Church of Egypt, which also held sway over the Levant, continually challenged the patriarchate in Constantinople. In the eyes of the Orthodox Church, Alexandria was a rebel camp of heretical believers. Antioch served as a heterogeneous center, theologically and geographically. While its clergy adopted the Orthodox teachings, there were substantial populations claiming allegiance to both camps.[13]

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The complexities of these theological and political debates are overwhelming. They were immensely important to the establishment of Christianity and the relationships through which different sects interacted. Nevertheless, it would be a long, protracted, and even superfluous exercise to detail all the minute details. For this reason, we will examine how this initial debate over consubstantiation affected the region of Palestine and the Christians living therein.

With the completion of the council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. there was a split between the sects that subscribed to its decisions and those who perceived different theological precepts. Hostility grew between the Orthodox Church and the Eastern Christian Churches that refused to adopt the recent council's word. Coptic, Jacobite, and Armenian believers were some of these many groups.[14] In the Levant, Monophysites maintained dominance and popularity. This perpetuated continual, and often ferocious, conflict between the Emperor in Constantinople and his Christian subjects living in the southern realm of the Byzantine Empire. The communities of Christians were at odds with each other and found little solace in the link through their Messiah.

The trend from the middle of the fifth century through the first third of the seventh, therefore, was to polarize the two camps and entrench their respective theologies. The schism

[13] Pacini, Andrea. ed. *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. pg. 31.
[14] Ibid. pg. 31.

between Constantinople and her subjects in the Levant grew for nearly two centuries. In 543, the Emperor appointed a Monophysite monk as the Bishop in Edessa. In doing so, his official actions perpetuated the split with vigor. His decision elevated Ya'qub al-Barda'i, a native to the Mesopotamian plain and a speaker of Syriac.[15] During his tenure, the Bishop campaigned for and proselytized the Monophysite doctrine through the Levant and greater Syria. Members of the Antioch Patriarchate became his followers and fell in line with the thought of a completely divine Jesus.

By the turn of the seventh century A.D., Eastern Christianity and largely Monophysite Arameans were influential in the Levant, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. Although they were under the political control of the Byzantine Empire, they successfully maintained independent religious institutions and belief systems. Local ethnic, familial, and tribal communities interacted with each other within the societal and economy spheres. These limited perspectives of community and identity helped perpetuate the Christian divide that was based on theology. Within Syria and Egypt, for instance,

The cities of Jerusalem, Damascus, and Edessa became influential centers that boasted sustainable and largely independent communities. Commercial trade and migration kept them in contact with the Arabian Peninsula to the south, Egypt and North Africa to the west, and the Sassanid Empire to the east. Most certainly there was consistent and substantial exchange with Byzantium to the north. The political link of the Empire was complemented by the link of Jesus, as well. One would be in error to assume that the theological disagreements caused total disengagement between the Christian populations.

In one remarkable instance, there is record of a Monophysite priest who traveled through Western Europe. The clergyman, originally from the Levant, worked his way around Gaul in the

[15] Betts, Robert Brenton. *Christians in the Arab East*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975. pg. 5.

mid-sixth century A.D. He also fostered a relationship with the Bishop of Lyons and convinced him that the Emperor was of Nestorian persuasion.[16] His interaction with the communities on Gaul offers proof that the Levantine Christians were able to amicably exchange ideas with Orthodox believers on the other side of the Mediterranean. This Syrian priest was joined with many others who traveled to Europe in order to trade goods with the people there. They actively worked with the indigenous population and, in some instances, spread their religious beliefs. However, in the end, it can be broadly stated that the Monophysites in Egypt and the Levant were highly skeptical and cautious of their Christian brothers to the north. Instances such as the former were possible, yet not in the majority.

It was for this reason that hostility was perpetuated between the communities of believers. For this reason, a good number of Christian contacts and missions from the Levant aimed south. There was a good deal of Christian activity in the Arabian Peninsula prior to the life of Muhammad. In fact, there was substantial contact between Aramean Christians and Arab travelers in the first centuries following Jesus' life. The well-established trade system of caravanserais and commerce allowed for a heightened level of exchange and contact. In fact, the structure of the trade routes perpetuated contact between the Arab traders and Aramean Christians in influential urban centers, such as Edessa, Jerusalem, Damascus, and Palmyra.[17] Through the first centuries following Jesus' death, meanwhile, Christian missionaries spread the word of the new covenant to tribes living in different areas throughout the peninsula. Christian communities were established in Yathrib well before Muhammad and his followers emigrated there in the famous *hijra* that now signifies year one of the Islamic calendar. In fact, Arab tribes as far south as present day Yemen, in Sanaa, adopted Christianity.

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[16] Pirenne, Henri. *Mohammed and Charlemagne.* Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc. 1954. pg. 82.
[17] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 35.

By the turn of the seventh century, Christianity had expanded and established itself as a dominant religion in the region of the Levant, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. Imbedded in the religion, believers found moral structures and traditions that established theological principles, institutional frameworks, and societal values. It became an enriched supplement to the existing ethnic identities and memories that came before Jesus. Meanwhile, the faith's proselytizers were not adverse to modifying its teachings, sacraments, and traditions in order to attract and accommodate new believers. Christianity maintained a relatively inclusive nature about it. Yet this accommodation to different ethnicities, traditions, memories, and identities made the Christian community susceptible to disunity and contention.

For this reason, theological disagreements and patriarchic schisms plagued the early Church. Debates over the complex, mysterious aspects of the Holy Trinity inhibited unity. Some Christians were unable to comprehend its structure; others believed it to be erroneous. Additionally, some Christian converts elected to assimilate their new religion into previous ethnic identities, rather than accept their new faith as a new, primary identifying marker. This was an inevitable consequence of such inclusive proselytizing and missionary work. It also muddied the ideas of identity and community. Such predicaments would plague the Christian communities of the Levant for centuries. Specifically, those living in the Holy Land of Jesus' life would be affected in tremendous fashions. Over the next 1400 years, Christians in Palestine would have to face communal disunity, heightened stigma living in the towns of their Messiah's life, and the expectations of Christendom's perception of them. Most importantly, they would have to survive the most successful, substantial, transformative invasion that the Levant had ever seen.

Chapter Two:
The Qur'an and the People of the Book

Early in the 7th century, according to the Gregorian calendar, a well-respected merchant from the Quraysh tribe was visited by the angel Gabriel. Finding solace in the hills and caves outside of Mecca, Muhammad was told, "Recite" the word of God and campaign for his will on Earth. From that moment of epiphany, he continually received the recitations from God that would eventually become the Qur'an. As the holy book of Islam, all Muslims necessarily revere its words and its messages. Its power transcends the poetry, illuminations, commands, and visions that it conjures. The grandeur of the Qur'an comes from its foundation in dogma. It garners unflinching respect from pious Muslims simply because it is understood to be the direct word of God. Muhammad was the vessel through which God transferred his commands to humanity.

The Qur'an enjoys unprecedented power and legitimacy in the Islamic World. Muslims submit to its word and understand that they must subscribe to its contents. Most of its followers are devout and devoted to its word. Nevertheless, the text itself does not enjoy such unflinching unity. Its structure is abnormal; the Surahs are loosely ordered by their length. The first Surah is the shortest in the Qur'an. From the second Surah forward, they progress from the longest to the shortest in length. However, even this is an inexact compilation; the length rule is not followed without error.

As one may suppose, organizing the Surahs by length dismisses chronology. This is a consequence of the manner in which the Qur'an was compiled. The original recitations, as they were revealed to the Prophet, were memorized by men and often recorded in writing, though not in a structured, well recorded manner. In fact, through the life of Muhammad, Arabian society was a primarily oral one. They lacked written history and anything they transmitted was done so through rhythmic, rhyming poetry.

By the death of Muhammad in 632, the recitations were scattered, disjointed, and in risk of being lost forever. Verses were scattered in men's minds and on scattered pieces of parchment in the Arabian peninsula. It was not until one of the "Rightly-Guided Caliphs," Abu Bakr, was compelled to compile the Prophet's recitations that a united book of God's message to the world was created. From this decision, what is known today to be the Holy Qur'an was developed.[18]

The act of compiling God's message, transmitted through the angel Gabriel, received by the prophet Muhammad, memorized by men, then written by scribes years later, presents tremendous difficulties. Nevertheless, the integrity of God's message is not challenged by Muslims. Rather, the Holy Qur'an is known to be the direct, truth, unerring word of God and the final revelation transmitted through an illustrious line of prophets. Linked to the Abrahamic tradition, the messages revealed to Muhammad were the truest version of what God had bestowed upon man, despite continual perversion by previous followers.

Yet within the Qur'an's text there are seeming inconsistencies that make it difficult to understand what are the true intentions and messages of God. One issue that continually arises pertains to the subject of abrogation. Certain subjects are often revisited in different Surahs. Yet some excerpts have contradicting revelations.

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[18] Noldeke, Theodor. "The Koran." *Sketches from Eastern History*. Trans. J.S. Black. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892. pg. 56.

The subject of alcohol and its consumption by pious Muslims is influenced by inconsistencies and abrogation, for example. In the fourth Surah it is written, "draw not near to prayer when you are drunken until you know what you are saying."[19] This text prohibits drinking alcohol during the time of prayer. However, it does not directly prohibit the drinking of alcohol by followers of God. In fact, the phrase, "when you are drunken" implies that the consumption of alcohol is a common and legal practice.

Meanwhile, in the fifth Surah, the recitations pronounce, "O believers, wine and arrow-shuffling, idols and divining-arrows are an abomination, some of Satan's work; so avoid it, haply so you will prosper."[20] It goes on to say that Satan uses alcohol and gambling to deceive the believers and to "bar [them] from the remembrance of God, and from prayer." This excerpt is a clear condemnation of alcohol and dissuades the believers from partaking in libations. It roots the drink in evil and deception, making it an impious object.

However, in the sixteenth Surah, the Qur'an states, "And of the fruits of the palms and the vines, you take therefrom an intoxicant and a provision fair. Surely in that is a sign for a people who understand."[21] This mention of alcohol is part of a larger tribute to the Earth and blessings of the natural world. It is combined with poetic tributes to cattle, pure milk, insects, mountains, and other benefits on Earth. Simply put, it is diametrically opposed to the message about alcohol found in the fifth Surah. In the sixteenth Surah, alcohol is elevated it a level of beauty and near-reverence. Yet history has shown that the former verses have been more influential. Alcohol is abhorred by the public face of Islam and, for the most part, is seen as a mechanism that leads to vice, temptation, and sin.

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[19] Arberry, A.J. trans. *The Koran Interpreted.* New York: Touchstone, 1955. pg. 107.
[20] Ibid. pg. 142.
[21] Ibid. pg. 293.

The predicament arises how to reconcile the contradiction and determine the true intention of God. The Qur'an mentions this issue, in fact, in the second Surah. God said to Muhammad, "And for whatever verse We abrogate or cast into oblivion, We bring a better or the like of it; knowest thou not that God is powerful over everything?"[22] While this verse indicates that each new revelation casts off the previous, the reader then returns to the issue of non-chronology in the recitation's compilation. Without indicating the order of the revelations, it is very difficult to determine the true intention of the Qur'an.

The risk of abrogation is that the wrong message is present alongside the true path. Regardless of the intended message's purpose or moral value, compromising ideas can create doubt in the validity and spirit of that message. This is particularly troublesome when it occurs in a sacred text. In the case of the Qur'an, the entire text is revered as the word of God and should be followed with great devotion. Abrogation, therefore, is counter-intuitive to the layman. It can cause great confusion. Meanwhile, it is easy for Muslims who are not well read to be told interpretations of abrogated texts. Non-skeptical pursuit of dogmatic text can lead to perversion. The chance of abuse is increased markedly when the holy text contains revisions and contradictory verses.

The inconsistencies of abrogation influence the way People of the Book are portrayed in the Qur'an. There are verses in the Holy Book that respect the first two Abrahamic religions. Many of Muhammad's actions in life, as chronicled in the *hadiths*, convey appreciation for Jews and Christians. Within Islam, it is understood that they are followers of God's message that preceded the final revelations of Muhammad. Though they have strayed from the true message, they are granted special recognition because of their close relationship to the straight path.

Yet it must be recognized that there is a troubling number of Surahs in the Qur'an that portray non-Muslims, and specifically the People of the Book, in a poor light. One of the most

[22] Ibid. pg. 41.

blatant condemnations of Jews and Christians is found in the second Surah. It includes a curse of Jews for their lack of fidelity to the word of God. The Qur'an commands, "Ask the Children of Israel how many a clear sign We gave them. Whoso changes God's blessing after it has come to him, God is terrible in retribution" (2:205).[23] Here, the Qur'an illuminates how Jews transgressed and betrayed the true path that had to be re-revealed through Muhammad.

Christians are given similar treatment, as well. It is said:

> And We gave Jesus son of Mary the clear signs, and confirmed him with the Holy Spirit. And had God willed, those who came after him would not have fought one against the other after the clear signs had come to them; but they fell into variance, and some of them believed, and some disbelieved (2:254).[24]

Thus, the People of the Book are cast in the lot with unbelievers; it is made clear, too, that "God guides not the people of the unbelievers" (2:266).[25] This series of verses from the Qur'an's Surahs can be interpreted in a very negative light. They portray Jews and Christians as apostates that have willfully strayed into sin and evil ways despite God's generosity. An omnipotent being showed these lowly humans the way to salvation and they chortled in contempt.

Furthermore, the Qur'an goes on to warn of Jews' and Christians' duplicitous intentions. It is written that, "Those unbelievers of the People of the Book and the idolaters wish not that any good should be sent down upon you from your Lord" (2:100).[26] It goes on to say, "Many of the People of the Book wish they might restore you as unbelievers, after you have believed, in the jealousy of their souls, after the truth has become clear to them" (2:103). In fact, the Qur'an states that the People of the Book are devoted to converting righteous Muslims to the former, sinful,

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[23] Ibid. pg. 56.
[24] Ibid. pg. 64,65.
[25] Ibid. pg. 67.
[26] Ibid. pg. 41.

erring faiths. This threat of apostasy is meant to warn Muslims of conversion, for "Never will the Jews be satisfied with thee, neither the Christians, not till thou followest their religion" (2: 114).[27]

These warnings of ill-intention are juxtaposed with clarity of the third Surah and its proclamation that, "The true religion with God is Islam" (3:17).[28] From here, segregation is campaigned. Just a few lines after the statement making Islam the "true religion," it is commanded, "Let not the believers take the unbelievers for friends, rather than the believers – for whoso does that belongs not to God in anything – unless you have a fear of them" (3:27).[29] The division between Jews and Christians from the followers of the straight path of Islam is emphasized throughout the remainder of the third Surah. The People of the Book are continually commanded to answer rhetorical questions pertaining to their loss of faith and lack of commitment to God's revealed word. One of the most stunning accusations of the Torah's and Gospels' fallacies comes when the Qur'an states, "No; Abraham in truth was not a Jew, neither a Christian; but he was a Muslim and one pure of faith; certainly he was never of the idolaters" (3:60).[30]

While this excerpt is an apparent elevation of Abraham, it is done at the cost of Judaism's and Christianity's integrity. It implies that no Jew or Christian can be pure of faith. It also implies that they are erring idolaters.

> There is a party of the People of the Book yearn to make you go astray; yet none they make to stray, except themselves, but they are not aware.
>
> People of the Book! Why do you disbelieve in God's signs, which you yourselves witness? People of the Book! Why do you confound the truth with vanity, and conceal the truth and that wittingly? (3:64)[31]

[27] Ibid. pg. 43.
[28] Ibid pg. 75.
[29] Ibid. pg. 76.
[30] Ibid. pg. 83.
[31] Ibid. pg. 83.

The accusations that People of the Book willingly speak falsehoods, deceive, and mislead believers pepper this and other surahs in the Qur'an. The negative characterization of Jews and Christians continues when it is implied that they are less capable than the believers. The Qur'an inquires, "How shall God guide a people who have disbelieved after they believed, and bore witness that the Messenger is true, and the clear signs came to them?" (3:80).[32] They are portrayed as beings that lack rational, moral, or logical faculties. Later in the surah, meanwhile, they are explicitly described as "desiring to make [God's way] crooked" (3:94).[33] Just verses later, the People of the Book are succinctly described as un-Godly.

Meanwhile, in the fifth surah, there is a dramatic condemnation of Jews as well as Christians. The Qur'an states:

> And with those who say 'We are Christians' We took compact; and they have forgotten a portion of that they were reminded of. So We have stirred up among them enmity and hatred, till the Day of Resurrection; and God will assuredly tell them of the things they wrought.[34] (5:15-17)

Christian theology was expressly targeted, as well, when it was written, "They are unbelievers who say, 'God is the Messiah, Mary's son'" (5:19). These excerpts are attacks on the beliefs, value system, and history of the Jewish and Christian religions. They allow for dangerous complications when they are present in a dogmatic text like the Qur'an.

Abrogation, however, complicates the situation and raises the question, 'What is the true meaning and intention of the Qur'an?' Most Muslim scholars believe that the last surah revealed to Muhammad was the ninth surah, al-Tauba ("Repentance").[35] By the logic of abrogation, it can be surmised that al-Tauba would provide the truest word of God. If this is true, however, then the People of the Book are not to be respected or seen as equals by Muslims. The ninth surah focuses

[32] Ibid. pg. 85.
[33] Ibid. pg. 86.
[34] Ibid. pg. 130.
[35] Spencer, Robert, ed. *The Myth of Islamic Tolerance.* Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2005.

greatly on the issue of hypocrisy and deliberate misleading from the truth. It emphasizes the need to be God fearing and to serve the omnipotent's will in every aspect of one's pious life. It also commands Muslims to accept converts to the true religion, but only when they have professed their faith and made efforts to fulfill what have become known as the Five Pillars.[36]

The word "idolaters" appears frequently in the surah. It is used in reference to unbelievers who are led astray and fall into evil and sin. They disregard the covenant set forth by God and transmitted through is Prophets. The only explicit condemnation of non-Muslims, however, is directed at Jews and Christians. It is written:

> Fight those who believe not in God and the Last Day and do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden – such men as practice not the religion of truth, being of those who have been give the Book – until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been humbled. (9:29)

The last point made in this verse refers to the institution that would come to be known as the *jizya* tax. This and other practices against non-Muslims will be described in chapter two.

> The Jews say, 'Ezra is the Son of God'; the Christians say, 'The Messiah is the Son of God.' That is the utterance of their mouths, conforming with the unbelievers before them. God assail them! How they are perverted! They have taken their rabbis and their monks as lords apart from God, and the Messiah, Mary's son – and they were commanded to serve but One God; there is no god but He; glory be to Him, above that they associate – desiring to extinguish with their mouths God's light; and God refuses but to perfect His light, though the unbelievers be averse.[37] (9:30-33)

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[36] The Five Pillars of Islam are compulsory duties that all Muslims are responsible to fulfill. They include the profession of faith, proclaiming, "I testify that there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his Messenger." Additionally, they include praying five times a day, the practice of alms-giving, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and completing the *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca by those who are able.

[37] Arberry, A.J. trans. *The Koran Interpreted.* New York: Touchstone, 1955. pg. 210.

After these attacks on the People of the Book, a command is made to Muslims. It is succinct. "And fight the unbelievers totally even as they fight you totally; and know that God is with the godfearing" (9:36).[38]

These excerpts from Qur'anic surahs reveal an underlying tension between the People of the Book and God's true word as revealed through Muhammad. Abrogation complicates the message and raises the issue of the authenticity and accuracy of each surah. The true message is believed to be present in the Qur'an, though it is very difficult for scholars – never mind laymen – to decipher the truth. The fact that the Qur'an, as a work of classic Arabic, has no punctuation makes it all the more difficult to understand the flowing poetry. While declensions aid the reader with vowel inflection, this practice is incredibly complex. The grammar rules that apply make it difficult for the greatest of authors to accurately convey their meanings. Muhammad was a reputable merchant from one of the more influential Meccan tribes. While one would assume he had at least some literacy in such a trade, according to Muslim beliefs and the Muslims tradition he was illiterate and incapable of writing such poetry.

The irony of the Qur'an's message, however, is that the true meaning of the Recitations is nearly immaterial in the historic context. The theological debate over the spirit of Islam has little relevance when one examines how the Qur'an was interpreted and used in the Islamic World. What is important is that the religious text contained messages that were easily interpreted- and oftentimes explicitly stated- as hostile towards the People of the Book. These messages gain influence under the façade of dogmatic legitimacy. If one is not to challenge the ideas found in a religious text, there are few options but to accept the message- and to act on it.

Either as a result of true intention or garbled abrogation, there are resentful messages in the Qur'an. As history has shown, such thoughts were acted upon. In fact, entire political institutions

[38] Ibid. pg. 211.

were formed in order to subjugate, exploit, and dehumanize Jews and Christians. They influenced the survival, stability, and influence of Eastern Christianity. For Christians in the Holy Land, much of their history was influenced by political philosophies and institutions that were meant to stifle their rich culture, society, and religious beliefs.

Chapter Three:
Islamic Political Philosophy and Dhimmitude

The Qur'an, as the holy book of Islam, has tremendous influence on the Islamic world. It has been the primer for Muslim actions and political philosophy throughout the centuries. Just the same, it must be recognized that there are additional sources that reveal Muslim actions and reveal how the Recitations of Muhammad have been interpreted and applied in history. These offer important insights into the way Muslims perceive the world, their neighbors, and the non-Muslims they came in contact with on a daily basis.

The Hadiths, for example, are revered sources of Islamic law and religious beliefs. They are stories of Muhammad's life that have been transmitted through innumerable sources and voices. They were initially transmitted as oral accounts of the Holy Prophet's life and have varying influence based on the reputation of their respective sources. These accounts of the prophet's life are so important because Muslims believe that Muhammad was a pure, perfect human. The Hadiths act as guides to Muslims, offering examples of human actions from an unerring source. The way Muhammad lived in life has largely determined Islam's application in the political realm.

His treatment of Jews and Christians, as People of the Book, greatly influenced how they were perceived and treated throughout history. For this reason, the Jewish tribe living at the oasis of Khaybar in the early 7th century unknowingly became an instrument of history. It was Khaybar

that Muhammad and his forces from Medina attacked in 628 AD. After Muhammad's victory, the Jewish community was still allowed to cultivate the land there. However, they were required to offer up half of their harvests to the followers of Muhammad. Furthermore, Muhammad maintained the option of breaking the agreement and banishing them from their land whenever he wished. The agreement that was established as called the *dhimma*.[39] The Arabic root for the word holds the connotations "denigrating," "reprimanding," and "indebtedness" as well as "subordination." Indeed, the title and the actions associated to it failed to be fundamentally positive. They required the People of the Book to seek the protection that many scholars believe the *dhimma* gave them, however qualified it may have been. However, the alternative was gratuitous intimidation and violence that was dominant within contemporary inter-religious relations.

Khaybar was one of the first places where the Mohammedans successfully defeated and conquered people outside of their belief system. It was also one of the first times Muhammad interacted with People of the Book outside of Medina. This is relevant because it reveals the moment that the concept of *dhimma* was implemented, for the first time, in practice. While it set the precedent for all conquered peoples outside of the Arabian Peninsula, the fact that the community was Jewish is particularly important. Just a decade later, the Rightly-Guided Caliph Umar expelled all Christians and Jews from the Hijaz, the hot desert in northwest Arabia located near Mecca and Medina. Umar based his decision on the Holy Prophet's treatment of the *dhimmi* at Khaybar. He also referred to Muhammad's advice, according to Hadith, that "two religions shall not remain together in the peninsula of the Arabs."[40]

In the following decades, the manner in which Islam would treat non-Muslims – and, specifically, People of the Book – was developed. What is most important to examine in the whole process is *l'esprit* of Dhimmitude. *Dhimmis* are understood to be communities of non-Muslims that

[39] Ye'or, Bat. *The Dhimmi*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1980. pg. 44.
[40] Ibid. pg. 47. (NOTE: Source refers to Baghawi. *Mishkat al-Masabih*. II, chap.11).

live under the protection of ruling Islam. Early in the formation of Islam, there arose a concept of the world that is still widely accepted today. According to it, two realms exist on Earth. The *dar al-Islam* is where the people living under God's word reside. The *dar al-harb*, or "abode of war," refers to the people, as well as their geographic possessions, that do not ascribe to Islam. The *dar al-harb* is perceived to be in contention with the *dar al-Islam*. The *dhimmis*, meanwhile, are communities of non-believers that live within the bounds of Islamic powers. They present risks and threats to *dar al-Islam*. However, due to the overwhelming presence of non-Muslims under Muhammad's forces, an exceptional rule had to be developed.

The concept of the *dhimmi* sought to resolve the inevitable conflict that would arise when non-Muslims lived under Muslim power. Islam's superiority over all previous revelations and religions, as stated in the Qur'an, allowed it to assume power over non-believers. In addition, the Qur'an's frequent threat of punishment for following non-believers, falling off the straight path, or committing apostasy made interaction with non-Muslims a dangerous proposition. Inherently, skepticism, distrust, and fear towards non-believers would develop. Enter the *dhimmi*.

On its most simple level, Dhimmitude is a transaction. Non-Muslims give proof of their cooperation under Islam – most usually by way of the *jizya* poll tax – and Muslims grant them protection. However, this "protection" is necessary only because of the adopted perception of Islam's preeminence over all others. If the Qur'an's excerpts demonizing non-believers and condemning alternative faiths weren't followed, protection would be superfluous. Instead, suspicious resentment of non-Muslims made security a concern.

One of the most influential examples of Dhimmitude is what has come to be known as the Covenant of Umar. Credited by some historians to either the Rightly-Guided Caliph Umar or the Umayyad Caliph of the early 8th century, it was a document allowing non-Muslim dhimmis to live in the *dar al-Islam*. This is a seemingly generous and liberal offer, coming at a time when

differences in ethnic or religious background often led to prejudicial actions and confrontations.[41] There are many different translations of the Covenant. Likewise, there were innumerable agreements instituted between Muslim rulers and *dhimmis* throughout history. What exists within many of these treaties, however, is the intention to regulate and subjugate Christian communities under Islam.

As Muslims spread their religion and rule beyond the Arabian Peninsula, the populace under Islam's rule became increasingly diverse in ethnicity, culture, and religion. Throughout the reign of the Rightly-Guided caliphs and the Umayyad Empire, Arabs held the most power. Yet by the 8th century A.D., the Abbasids had come to rule over most of the Islamic realm.[42] They owed their influence to forces beyond the Arab realm and, therefore, put increasing influence on Islam as an identifier and unifier in society. Non-Muslims necessarily became increasingly stigmatized and marginalized. As the caliphs and jurists attempted to establish guidelines for their state structures, the Qur'an and Muslim traditions came to the fore. Unfortunately, so did an emphasis on Islam's superiority – and the *dhimmi's* inferiority – that humiliated and exploited Christians and Jews, alike.

To be clear, the Covenant of Umar offered privileged opportunities at that time in history. The agreement granted ability for certain *dhimmis* to continue living under Islam, with restrictions. Many contemporary powers, meanwhile, forced all conquered peoples into submission and assimilation. Indeed, the Muslim forces did this for many other communities. However, Christians, Jews, Magians, Samaritans, and Sabians were granted the opportunity to live under their respective religions, assuming that they accepted specific constraints on their religious practices.[43]

As was stated earlier, there were innumerable agreements made between Muslim rulers and *dhimmi* communities throughout history. One such agreement, which was submitted by a Christian

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[41] Ye'or, Bat. *The Dhimmi*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1980. pg. 48.
[42] Tritton, A.S. *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects.* London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1970. pg. 2,3.
[43] Ibid. pg. 5.

community in the Levant in within the first two centuries of Islam, is a strong representation of many of the covenants made between Islam and the *dhimmis*. Quoted in a letter from Umar, it listed dozens of restrictions that the Christian community agreed upon. They wrote, "When you came to us we asked of you safety for our lives, our families, our property, and the people of our religion on these conditions."[44] From there, they wrote out their restrictions. The format of the letter implies that they asked for the regulations found therein. This is highly unusual and unlikely, however, since the Christians listed, "[to] be humiliated." A.S. Tritton, a renowned British historian and expert on the Covenant of Umar, noted that it would be highly unusual for the conquered Christians to dictate the terms of their relationship with their Muslim conqueror. Furthermore, the covenant quoted the Qur'an when it mentioned paying the tribute tax and being humiliated; this was directly influenced by the Qur'an and Surah 9:29.[45] Yet one of the restrictions upon the Christian community is that they must not "learn the Koran nor teach it to [their] children."[46]

This contradiction indicates the spirit of the covenant and Dhimmitude. It reveals the resentment that permeated in the ultimatums made with Christian *dhimmis* from the first decades and centuries following Muhammad's death. It was highly tempered and liberal compared to the wrath saved for apostates, heretics, and polytheists, but it was resentment nonetheless. It was not tolerance; such a compromising premise is inapplicable to religious dogma based in universal truth. Rather, it was an effort to incorporate important, numerous, and often influential populations. Nonetheless, it is not equality but, instead, the implementation of strict hierarchy. The Christian community requested an agreement that would grant them security. This indicates that they were in peril. Their community, and its way of life, was at risk. Within the Muslim world, they were

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[44] Ibid. pg. 5.
[45] In Surah 9:29, it reads, "Fight those who believe not in God and the Last Day and do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden – such men as practice not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book – until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been humbled."
[46] Tritton, A.S. *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects.* London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1970. pg. 6.

targeted by Qur'anic script and those who believed that the People of the Book were erring apostates that failed to pursue the straight path.

The Covenant of Umar restricted Christians from exercising some of the most basic expressions of their faith. It prohibited the beating of *nakus* and the ringing of bells that were used in religious ceremonies. Christians were not allowed to raise their chants or prayers above whispers. The building of new churches and monasteries was banned and any repairs done to existing structures required permission from the Muslim ruler. Crucifixes were often not allowed to be displayed in public, especially on buildings. The Covenant of Umar demanded that Muslim structures be higher than those of Christians and that Christians remain silent at the funerals of their brethren. At the end of the lengthy document, it is written, "We impose these terms on ourselves and our co-religionists; he who rejects them has no protection."[47]

Many other treaties and covenants, meanwhile, are much simpler than the one credited to the Christian community under Umar. Some succinctly mention a payment of tribute. Meanwhile, Khalid B. Walid guaranteed safety for the *dhimmis* of Damascus that paid a tribute and Umar's agreement with Jerusalem expressly stated, "They shall not be persecuted for religion's sake."[48] However, there was another agreement made between Umar, Abu Ubaida, and a Christian patrician that proclaimed, "He who breaks these conditions may be slain and his women and children made slaves."[49]

The last quote raises the topic of implementation. While many of the restrictions listed the covenants are highly limiting and dehumanizing, they were not always applied with draconian ferocity. While this work will later discuss the applied treatment of Christians throughout history, it would be prudent to now mention that the law was not always entirely followed. Implementation

[47] Ibid. pg. 5,6.
[48] Ibid. pg. 9,10.
[49] Ibid. pg. 11.

often depended on current events, stability, relations between the communities, and the character of the ruler in power.[50]

Beyond any capitulation covenant that may have been agreed upon, Muslim rulers also instituted a series of taxes that generated revenue at the expense of the dhimmis; the taxes also subordinated the non-Muslims and subjugated them to the will of rulers acting with Islamic fervor. The *Kharaj* tax, for example, was based on the principle that the Muslim community, or *Umma*, was superior to the non-Muslim populace. Going even further, the tax was representative of Islam's ownership of the land of the conquered non-Muslims. Essentially, it compromised the concept of private property and established a pseudo-feudal system. Former landowners became *dhimmi* tenants on their own properties, who, additionally, had to pay a tax to live in peace in the Muslim territory.[51]

Another tax targeted at the *dhimmis* was the *jizya* tax. *Jizya*, which means "penalty" in Arabic, was the financial cost required of non-Muslims if they were to live without harassment.[52] It established their legal status as protected people from Muslim intimidation and aggression. However, as we will see, even the payment of the *jizya* did not fully liberate *dhimmis* from fear or exploitation. Meanwhile, the concept of the *jizya* offers intriguing insights into the Muslim perception of the world.

Sayyid Abul a'la Maududi, an influential 20th century Pakistani theologian and Islamic thinker, said that payment of the *jizya* "establishes the sanctity of [*dhimmis'*] lives and property;" according to him, it is a tax alone that bestows rights upon the ranks of Christians and other non-Muslims.[53] There are other influential Muslim intellectuals who condone the use of the *jizya*.

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[50] Ibid. pg. 16.
[51] Ye'or, Bat. *The Dhimmi*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1980. pg. 52.
[52] Spencer, Robert, ed. *The Myth of Islamic Tolerance.* Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2005. pg. 62.
[53] Ibid. pg. 62.

Some believe that cessation of the *jizya* only comes when one converts to Islam or dies.[54] Meanwhile, the *Shafiite* school of Islamic jurisprudence makes it clear that conversion does not automatically cease *jizya* collection. Non-Muslims, therefore, can be exploited and targeted even after they choose to follow the straight path.

The *jizya* is not a contrivance of a few radical Islamists. It was used frequently and widely in numerous Islamic regimes, including the great Ottoman Empire. The *jizya's* influence and resilience comes from its connection to the Qur'an and the Hadiths of Muhammad. It is linked to the actions and spirit of both the Holy Prophet and the Holy Book. According to an edict from Caliph al-Amir bi-Ahkam Illah (r. 1101-1130 AD.), the *jizya* poll tax is ordained by God.[55] He quoted the ninth Surah, stating that People of the Book must pay a tribute and be "humbled."[56]

These religiously motivated political maneuvers were discriminatory towards non-Muslims. They targeted those who held different beliefs and backgrounds from those who followed the ways of the Prophet. However, it is important to acknowledge that Muslims had company in such endeavors. Prejudicial and exploitable activities were commonplace in the region during the establishment of Islam. The Byzantine Empire had established means of exploiting and intimidating the Jewish population under its rule, for example. At this point in history, ethnic and religious identities were paramount. They defined communities, politics, culture and tradition, and most importantly, they defined security and alliances. For this reason, exclusivity was often preferred by ruling bodies. It was easier to delineate borders and administer governances when communities shared everything from physical carriage and language to faith and moral systems.

Beyond the dogmatic treatment of Christians and the covenants instituted by caliphs and Islamic law systems, there was the rational sphere of the Islamic realm that supported such

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[54] Ibid. pg. 62.
[55] Ye'or, Bat. *The Dhimmi*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1980. pg. 189, 189.
[56] Arberry, A.J. trans. *The Koran Interpreted.* New York: Touchstone, 1955. pg. 210.

treatment of the *dhimmi* communities. Islamic political philosophy is a complex, seemingly dichotomous institution that has many voices. As the previous chapter shows, Muslims are commanded to follow God without challenging his authority or will. The root of the word Islam- "S-L-M"- means "submission" in God's language of Arabic. However, philosophy requires the reasoning faculty and the ability to think critically for oneself. Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, a 19th century Muslim political philosopher and nationalist, wrote "Religion versus Science;" it is an excellent essay about the fundamental conflicts between the foundations of dogmatic religion and skeptical science. In it, he wrote, "No agreement and no reconciliation are possible between these religions and philosophy. Religion imposes on man its faith and its belief, whereas philosophy frees him of it totally or in part."[57]

Despite the fundamental conflict between dogma and rationale, there have been many Muslims throughout history who have studied and written on the subject of political philosophy. They have shaped its structure and implantation and offer a glimpse into how Muslims perceive the political sphere. While a review of how the ruling Islamic powers influenced the Levant and the region known as Palestine will be taken in future pages, it is important to examine contemporary voices in Islamic political philosophy. They will be compared with the Qur'an and Hadith, so that the reader may see correlations between the two- as well as departures- even as fourteen centuries separate them.

An excerpt from a Hadith, spoken through Hafiz Abu Yali, reports that Muhammad said:

> Inquire not from the people of the Book regarding anything. They will not lead you to the right path. They themselves are misguided. If you followed them, you would either corroborate a falsehood or falsify a truth. By God, had Moses been alive

[57] Moaddel, Mansoor & Kamran Talattof, eds. *Modernist and Fundamentalist Debates in Islam*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. pg. 28.

> amongst you it would not have been permissible for him to adopt any other course except following me.[58]

This, as well as verses from the Qur'an that were examined earlier in this work, is used as a founding principle in Sayyid Qutb's work, *Islam as the Foundation of Knowledge*. Qutb was an Islamist and leading member of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s. He condemned any Muslim who chose to "entertain" a "good opinion" about Jews or Christians; he based his position on the Prophet Muhammad's clear profession found in the Hadith. Qutb also attacked the Christendom and the Church, writing that it "was tyrannizing human beings under the garb of 'The Heavenly Kingdom.'"[59]

Qutb's attacks on People of the Book and the Church develop from a belief that Islam is the exclusive and righteous path to salvation. "The practical shape of absolute servitude to God is that Allah alone should be deemed the Lord (the worshipped) in faith, practice, and law."[60] This Islamist stance confirms God, his Messenger, and the Recitations as the exclusive sources of law and order in the temporal world. Qutb affirms that "Divine Law" regulates and determines every aspect of human life.[61] This belief lies concretely in the first Surah of the Qur'an, where it is stated that God is to be served and followed without question.[62]

Qutb also stated that the Shariah, or Islamic religious law, regulates all political, economic, and social realms. He also wrote that the Shariah establishes a moral system that should be followed; Shariah law determines "the value and worth of men, things, and deeds in social and collective life."[63] Put succinctly, Islam and its culture "circumscribes the entire intellectual and

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[58] Ibid. pg. 204.
[59] Ibid. pg. 202.
[60] Ibid. pg. 197.
[61] Ibid. pg. 198.
[62] Arberry, A.J. trans. *The Koran Interpreted.* New York: Touchstone, 1955. pg. 29.
[63] Moaddel, Mansoor & Kamran Talattof, eds. *Modernist and Fundamentalist Debates in Islam*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. pg. 198.

practical activities of man."[64] For this reason, all other moral systems, laws, and religions are superfluous. This argument complements the inherent belief that Islam is established as the final, truest, purest revelation of God; all other religions have fallen in sin and error.

Sayyid Abul a'la Maududi is recognized as one of the most influential Islamic thinkers of the 20th century. A Pakistani political philosopher, he put forth an intriguing thesis in his work *Fallacy of Rationalism*. In it, Maududi increased the exclusivity of Islam by stating that non-Muslims have no "right to speak as a Muslim" or criticize their faith *to* Muslims.[65] Non-Muslims are portrayed as lesser beings. They don't have the rights or the abilities to speak about Islam to true believers.

To bolster his argument, Maududi used an intriguing example – St. Paul and the Christian Church. Maududi elevated Islam by belittling followers of St. Paul and the greater Christian World. Specifically, he wrote that St. Paul's beliefs limited the lives of his followers with petty restrictions. He also wrote that Christianity had turned humans into sinful, evil masses that are worse than "lifeless bodies and helpless children."[66] Maududi wrote that Shariah law was righteous, God's will, and necessary in life. In comparison, Christendom, with its embrace of Liberal notions, had shrunk itself "to just a mere dogma and faith."[67] Sayyid Qutb attacked Christendom, its theology, and the Church's institutions, as well. He wrote that it was not God's will to ordain "a few 'consecrated persons'." Qutb condemned the hierarchy established by the Church and, specifically, the "Papal regime."[68]

The supremacy of Islam is emphasized time and time again by numerous Islamic political philosophers. The view that Islam is necessary on Earth is pervasive in the Islamic world. It also

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[64] Ibid. pg. 202.
[65] Ibid. pg. 210.
[66] Ibid. pg. 211.
[67] Ibid. pg. 212.
[68] Ibid. pg. 228.

carries serious implications for relations between Muslims and the "non-believers." When one's views are believed to be paramount, it is very easy to consciously and subconsciously dehumanize those who don't fall in step. The results of this can be appalling.

Sayyid Qutb, for example, espoused to a very popular view in Islam. He followed the many centuries old concepts of *dar al-harb* and *dar al-Islam*. Throughout the centuries, myriad Muslims have sought to define rules of engagement and tactics that should be used towards the non-believers. In addition to these two realms, however, Qutb wrote about "the zimmies." More accurately transcribed as Dhimmis, it is the Islamic political institution name referring to non-Muslims residing in the *dar al-Islam*. Jews and Christians are included in the rank of Dhimmis.

According to Qutb, Muhammad's actions made it clear that "wars should be declared against" the People of the Book "who were enemies of Allah and His Prophet," until they capitulated and paid the *jizya* tax for their protection. The disposition towards violence, ultimatums, and Dhimmi submission to a humiliating tax offer startling insights into Islamic perceptions of non-Muslims and Dhimmis. It also shows subtleties in a Muslim psyche that challenge equality and liberty in the Islamic world.

The idea that any one belief is in constant battle with other thought systems can cause tremendous issues. The founding belief is disposed towards fear and violence rather than love and acceptance. This can lead to distrust, suspicion, and aggression towards peoples, societies, and governments that don't ascribe to one's precise beliefs. In a word, the idea can lead towards aggression. It is not surprising, therefore, that Qutb wrote that "Jihad is an inherent necessity of Islam."[69] According to him, Islam is the straight and righteous path for every human being. However, there have been myriad barriers, political institutions, and erroneous religions that have

[69] Ibid. pg. 242.

deceived man and inhibited the proselytizing of God's word. Therefore, "Islam resorts to force so that there may remain no curtain between Islam and human beings."

Sayyid Qutb also wrote that there must be "no cease-fire by Islam against *jahiliyyah* […] unless they surrender before the authority of Islam."[70] *Jahiliyyah*, or "ignorance," refers to the historical period before the Recitations; it also can be used in reference to non-believers. Those who live by value and moral systems, religions, or cultures that predate Islam are seen as inferior, flawed, deceived, and deceptive. As Qutb wrote, "Islam is a live and dynamic force while in the latter case [*jahiliyyah*] stands totally deprived of all inherent and natural motivations." The continued condemnation of non-Islamic institutions, religions, and belief systems indicates a pervasive distrust of things non-Muslim. It also exercises a hubris and arrogant elevation of Islam that inhibits critical introspection.

It is vital that one realizes that the authors of these pieces- prescribing inequitable treatment to non-Muslims and affirming the necessary supremacy of Islam- are Islamic political philosophers from the 19th and 20th centuries. These are not archaic texts that have little influence on contemporary events. They come from influential Muslim thinkers that resided in nation-states that exist today. They link their theses to the Qur'an, the fourteen-century-old actions of their Holy Prophet, and a centuries old pursuit of stagnant principles. They hearken back to a time in history where ethnic and religious identities protected some and persecuted others. It was a reality that affected many different communities in Christendom, the Islamic World, and elsewhere. Governing bodies of all sorts used such institutions. In many areas of the world they have become archaic, unjust, and wrong throughout the centuries. But many of the unequal ideas ascribed in the Qur'an are still accepted and applied today. That *dhimmis*, the *jizya* tax, and uncritical devoutness

[70] Ibid. pg. 243.

to dogma have survived throughout the centuries is remarkable. That they still impede human equality today is horrifying.

Chapter Four:
The Muslim Conquest of Palestine

The middle of the seventh century A.D. brought tremendous changes to the political, religious, and cultural spheres of society in the Levant and region known as Palestine. Until followers of Muhammad and bringers of the Qur'an swept out of the Arabian Peninsula in the south, Monophysite Christians enjoyed the greatest amount of influence in the Levant. The belief that Jesus was of a singular, divine nature permeated the diverse community of believers throughout the area. The idea was held by Syrian and Coptic believers, as well as most Armenians. However, Chalcedonian doctrine also held sway in the region and was accepted by some Armenian Christians. The latter doctrine, which held that Jesus' human and divine natures existed in one being, contested with the formers' stance of absolute divinity. While patriarchates did maintain relations for the most part, ethnicity was one of the most significant issues that divided the community of Christians.[71]

But a new religious and political force was developing to the south that would greatly alter the course of Christendom. Raised in the Hijaz city of Mecca and establishing himself in the nearby city of Yathrib, Muhammad revealed himself to be the last Holy Prophet and the bringer of God's true, unadulterated word. His religious, political, and military actions were remarkably effective

[71] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 43.

and garnered unprecedented influence in western Arabian Peninsula. Within a decade, he rose from banished heretic to revered, righteous man. His followers, the Mohammedans, pledged allegiance to him and the revealed word that he provided to them through oral recitation. But in 632 A.D., just ten years after the *hijra* to Yathrib that denotes the start of the Islamic calendar, Muhammad died.

He left an un-compiled number of oral recitations, no system for succession, and a community of believers that was unsure whether they were loyal to the word of God or to his messenger. It was a volatile moment in the rise of Islam. Indeed, tremendous issues over the religious and political nature of Muhammad's prophecies would affect the Mohammedans for centuries to come. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this moment in history, however, is that the movement which Muhammad fostered flourished despite all the unknowns. Although many of the decisions made were contested and schisms immediately erupted in the community of believers, a form of succession was established and Islam continued to expand its influence throughout the region.

Islamic forces continued the spread of God's word with indefatigable vigor for centuries to come. Within a decade of Muhammad's death, Arab Muslim forces had conquered and came to control the far reaches of the Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia, the Levant, and Egypt.[72] Tribes from throughout the Arabian Peninsula were tasked to invade Palestine and sack the countryside for plunder. Due to the size and structure of the invading bands, they were cautious of assaulting the larger towns.[73] The tribes most influenced the Negev in the south; they made traveling and commerce trade dangerous as they cut communications and threatened the stability of the region. By 634 A.D. the campaign garnered them the Gaza region. There were some four thousand deaths inflicted upon the indigenous Christian and Jewish populations.[74]

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[72] Betts, Robert Brenton. *Christians in the Arab East*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975. pg. 7.
[73] Ye'or, Bat. *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1996. pg. 45.
[74] Ibid. pg. 45.

Hearing of the conquest in the south, towns closed their gates and became dangerously isolated; Jaffa, Cesarea, Nablus, and Jerusalem fell under this fate. Meanwhile, in a sermon given on Christmas 634, Jerusalem's patriarch Sophronius proclaimed that is was impossible for the city's Christian population to make its traditional pilgrimage to Bethlehem. They were, "chained and nailed by fear of the Saracens." It was, no doubt, strong imagery coming from a man of the Christian faith.

With their conquest of the Holy Land and the Fertile Crescent, the Muslim forces brought under their control a large population of Christians. Despite the ravaging of the southern rural communities, the latter's indigenous population perceived the arriving victors as vanquishers, of sorts. That is, the largely Monophysite population had lived under the Roman Empire, and thus Orthodox influence, for centuries. They struggled with tensions coming from theological disagreements and felt suppressed under foreign patriarchates that didn't recognize many of their most fundamental beliefs.

The ethnic aspect of the indigenous Christians' struggle with Byzantium should not be overlooked, as well. Many of the largely Aramaic and Hamitic speakers of Syria and Egypt deeply resented the imperial control of their alien rulers. The contest between local Christian majorities and a controlling Latin minority sustained a high degree of tension and pervasive struggles. Hostility had grown between the governor and the governed. Hostility survived between patriarch and heretical laypeople. It is for this reason that much of the Christian population welcomed a change of power.

Reciprocally, the Christian resentment and antipathy towards Byzantine, Orthodox repression enabled the Muslim forces to win influence in the Levant with ease. One Syrian Monophysite proclaimed:

> The God of vengeance […], seeing the evilness of the Romans who, wherever they ruled, cruelly pillaged our churches and monasteries and mercilessly condemned us, led the sons of Ishmael from the region of the south in order to deliver us from Roman hands.[75]

Such viewpoints allowed Muslims greater latitude in their attempts to consolidate power, exploit locally successful political structures, and establish their intended rule. They also allowed shrewd leaders to perpetuate divisions and hostility between the Christian camps. Such conflict softened Muslim fears of insidious behavior on the part of Christian citizens. As newly instated rulers over old Byzantine lands, the fear of citizen loyalty towards Constantinople was legitimate. Conflict with Christendom would dispose the Christians towards helping the Muslims as they rose to influence in the region.

In fact, for most of the Christian population in Palestine, the Muslim invasion allowed for greater privilege than under Byzantine rule. Initially, the invaders were oblivious and apathetic towards the Monophysites' doctrinal schism with the Orthodox Church. They were treated, therefore, as Christians and were not prosecuted *specifically* over their concept of Jesus' nature. Previously disputed beliefs and ethnicity were no longer at the fore of persecution. Much of the government prosecution that they suffered under Byzantine rule was revoked and their legal status was elevated.[76] The absence of persecution over their non-Orthodox beliefs was complemented by Islam's less contentious view of Jews and Christians as "People of the Book." Christians appeared to be in a safer position vise a vise the Muslim powers; as non-believers, they were in the best position for the most preferential treatment. This indeed seemed to be the case initially, for there is little record of Christian persecution in the first decades of Muslim rule in Palestine. However, as time progressed, this would not always be the case.

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[75] Ibid. pg. 57.
[76] Betts, Robert Brenton. *Christians in the Arab East*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975. pg. 8.

After acquiring control throughout the region, the Muslims found themselves in power over a non-Muslim majority that was heavily Christian and Zoroastrian. The Arab Muslim conquerors, meanwhile, had no experience or knowledge to drawn from in order to maintain control over such a vast expanse and diverse population. Shrewdly, they decided to adopt the prevailing political institutions and traditions in the areas they conquered.[77] Rather than attempting to blindly create new systems of governance, tax collection, and economic institutions, the Muslim powers elected to benefit from existing, well-tested frames of rule. The brilliance of this move solidified the conquerors' ability to maintain control over vast stretches of acquired lands for extended periods of time.

Some of the governing principles that were adopted from Byzantine precedent were laws used by the Christian empire to subordinate Jews.[78] Baladhuri, meanwhile, wrote that in the lands of present day Syria and Palestine, Jews lived under a Christian ordained, *dhimmi*-like system and had to pay the precursor of a *kharaj* tax to their keepers.[79] Establishing the legal inferiority of an undesired populous was a common strategy used by religiously identified communities. In fact, this reuse of previously established political strategies is not unprecedented. Ironically, Byzantine laws that were meant to demean and dehumanize Jews outlined many of the restrictions that were imposed on Christians and other non-Muslims in the Islamic world. Links can be found between the laws relating to proselytizing, holy places, segregation, marriage restrictions, and apostasy that existed in both realms.[80]

Overall, the initial Christian reaction was highly positive towards their Muslim "liberators" of Byzantine, inter-Christian, imperial oppressors. Short sighted satisfaction over the end of ethnic and theological conflict with Byzantium outshined grim reality. The possibility that one imperial

[77] Ye'or, Bat. *The Dhimmi*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980. pg. 48.
[78] Spencer, Robert. ed. *The Myth of Islamic Tolerance*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2005. pg 148.
[79] Ye'or, Bat. *The Dhimmi*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980. pg. 68.
[80] Ibid. pg. 87.

power replaced another didn't appear to affect the population. Large contingents of Christians voluntarily cooperated with the Muslim establishment and were eager to act as mediators. Throughout Mesopotamia, the Levant, and Egypt, Christians were included within the new administration. They worked as translators, doctors, and ministers of state for the early caliphs. Orthodox, Monophysite, and Nestorian Christians were among the ranks of cooperating subjects.[81]

Muslim utilization of the preexisting political, economic, and religious models further established the religious hierarchies within each religious order. That is, many of the Christian sects benefited from great, consolidated power because they were granted internal governing powers under Islam. This trend would further synthesize the temporal and spiritual influence of the Christian churches, as well.[82] For example, many clergy and church figures were responsible for civil duties. Tax collection, judicial demands, and administrative functions were under the purview of religious communities. Historian Bat Ye'or has observed, "The replacement of Christians […] political and civil power by Muslim political power increased the hold of […] Churches over their communities."[83]

The prospect of gaining influence, prosperity, and reputation as middlemen was attractive. A period of cooperation and seemingly mutual respect did exist for a time. Christian leaders worked with Arab Muslim tribal leaders who had settled in Palestine. These recent arrivals acted as agents of the greater Muslim ruler over the region. Coming specifically from Yemen and the Hijaz, they appropriated lands and wealth; this often meant the previous non-Muslim owners were stripped of their property. From their new posts, the Arab Muslim tribal leaders collected the *ata*.[84] This annual stipend of sorts was taken from the taxes collected from local non-Muslims.

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[81] Betts, Robert Brenton. *Christians in the Arab East*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975. pg. 119.
[82] Ye'or, Bat. *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1996. pg. 58.
[83] Ibid. pg. 58.
[84] Ibid. pg. 60.

Within two generations of the initial Arab Muslim conquest, the treatment of indigenous non-Muslims was changing. The Christian population was greatly affected by new precedents. Although their new Muslim rulers were still in the minority, they had inflicted great loss upon the Christians and Jews in the region. The plundering of the countryside, stripping of land, and demand of taxes was putting immediate stress upon the local population. Meanwhile, some of the most pervasive changes that developed were alterations to language. Language was intimately linked with ethnicity and cultural memory. It was a defining aspect of one's identity. Shifts in language hegemony, preference, or utility in society had pervasive effects. In many cases, changes in language usage inhibited communication between peoples, even within communities that were once bound by coherent manners of exchange.

The Quraysh dialect of Arabic that was spoken by the Arab Muslims was imposed upon the Levant and other regions. It was the language of Muslims' holy book, the administrators, and their culture. For this reason, it was used within the political realm, religious circles, and increasingly in commerce and cultural exchanges. Indigenous Aramaic, Syriac, Coptic, and even Greek suffered. Their survival and usage were inhibited by the new, dominant language. With that, major identity markers were lost for the majority non-Muslims. Yet, like the effect of the Christians and other *dhimmis* upon Levantine society, their languages would impart permanent embellishments on Arabic. Among many influences, large amounts of vocabulary referring to theology and politics were adopted from Syriac, Aramaic, and Greek.[85] In fact, much of the indigenous Levantine population wrote Arabic in the Greek script. By the ninth century A.D., Judeo-Arabic script was developed and in use.

Inversely, the Arab Muslim body in power was dependent on the Christian population and its language skills. Most Muslims were illiterate in Greek, Syriac, and other languages that held

[85] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 61.

Byzantine laws, Hellenic philosophy, and traditions of past societies. For this reason, some of the more influential Islamic philosophers and political figures required aid from Christian translators. Al-Farabi (d. 950), for example, did not know Greek or Syriac and relied on Christian translators in order to benefit from precursor civilizations.[86] This dependence on the non-Muslim population, mixed with the disposition to learn from previous works and laws, inclined Islam's culture towards a certain degree of Hellenization. The Christians in the Levant, and specifically Palestine, were instrumental in this trend. The linguistic advantage of Christians, meanwhile, established their monopoly, of sorts, over the scribe profession in the Levant, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. Most Muslims surrendered this influential duty to Christians; they had much more experience and incentive to translate and record language. In fact, Christians and Jews found success and great value in linguistic studies and scribe positions. Meanwhile, Muslims overlooked the subject and pursued other means.[87] This was another reason why Christians were able to play an essential role in Muslim administration and cultural matters at the beginning of the Muslim rule. Their knowledge of languages, as well as Byzantine traditions, helped Islam synthesize itself with the Greek political structures and philosophy preceding it.[88]

Yet inevitably, the indigenous communities had to submit to Arabic. The language was revered and elevated by the Arab Muslims in a way unseen by previous societies in the region. According to Muslims, the Qur'an held the direct word of God that was revealed to the holy Prophet Muhammad. God's final and unerring revelation was communicated to Muhammad through the language of Arabic. The message and the linguistic carriage both took on irrevocable, deified characteristics. Just as the message could never be altered, the language had to be maintained in its holy, original form.

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[86] Ibid. pg. 63.
[87] Le Strange, Guy. *Palestine Under the Moslems*. Beirut: Khayats, 1965. pg. 22.
[88] Pacini, Andrea. ed. *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. pg. 4.

Imposing Arabic upon the peoples within the Islamic World became a common effect of this theological premise. It was the language of Islam. Furthermore, its elevated status made it the language of politics, economy, and general utility in Muslim realms. Immersion in Arabic strongly influenced the Christian societies. Over the course of the first centuries following the Islamic invasion, religious ceremonies were affected by the new reality. By the tenth century A.D., Coptic sermons were delivered in Arabic. The Melkites and Syrian Jacobites followed suite and their liturgies were shifted a century later.[89]

This linguistic shift was one of the first, pervasive challenges to the Christian population in Palestine. For the first time since their communities of faith were developed, an external force was influencing their language and threatening their constructed identity. It is true that the Levantine Christianity developed in a hostile setting of Byzantine political influence, ethnic quarreling, and dissenting theological structures. Nevertheless, Christianity developed and established itself. It survived and prospered. This was accomplished in an environment that offered few philosophical or pragmatic barriers towards the new covenant. That is, the life of Jesus ran consist with many of the Hellenic and Hebrew traditions existing in the region. There were philosophical and theological foundations for Christianity. Conflict and disagreements arose, but there were very few fundamental contradictions existing within the larger society.

With the arrival of Islam, the most basic principles of Christianity and myriad other ethno-religious communities were challenged. There were religious contradictions. There were disagreements in historical record and the memory of Abrahamic traditions. There was the seemingly benign language barrier. However, the language of Islam was non-negotiable. Christians, as *dhimmis*, had to resign to its hegemony. Historian Kenneth Cragg wrote brilliantly, "Arabic-speaking Christians were caught in a strong paradox, which has attended them ever since.

[89] Ibid. pg. 32.

The paradox passes from language to identity, from the medium of faith and culture to the psyche and the soul. The language that gives them identity has its supreme identity elsewhere."[90] Arabic was adopted by the Christian community, seemingly voluntarily. But the decision to acquiesce was part of a systemic conflict between Christians and other *dhimmi* communities against the indomitable will of Islamic primacy.

[90] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 31.

Chapter Five:

Palestinian Christians and Dhimmitude in the Holy Land

The trend for many Eastern Churches was to cooperate with Islamic rulers and assist in the maintenance of their governmental system. The Churches often made agreements that granted them custodianship over their communities of believers. For clergy and the larger church bodies, the benefits of supporting the Muslims were influence and security. Meanwhile, acting at the pleasure the Islamic rulers allowed the churches to continue their influence over their religious followers. It was a shrewd, *quid pro quo* exchange. These political maneuvers can be credited for maintaining the life of the Church under another religious power. However, the decisions were often made at the cost of their Christian laypeople. Reciprocity was often not factored into the exchange between the Christian custodians and the Islamic rulers. Furthermore, with the churches' focus being on maintaining a formal relationship with those in power, sacrifices had to be made when disagreements occurred. Unfortunately, for the greater Christian population, it was at these times that they realized that their clergy were inhibited by their decisions.[91]

Restrictions upon the Christian population in the Holy Land were not immediately apparent. In fact, when Rightly-Guided Caliph Umar visited Jerusalem in the latter half of the seventh

[91] Spencer, Robert. ed. *The Myth of Islamic Tolerance.* Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2005. pg. 150.

century, he proclaimed, "security for [Christian] lives, property, churches, and crosses."[92] He went on to command, "They shall not be persecuted for religion's sake." There may have been many different reasons for Umar's decision in Jerusalem. The heterogeneous character of the city may have come into play. The three great monotheistic religions of Abraham saw it as a holy place; two of them revered their holiest sites within the Old City's walls. Umar may have been attempting to respect the mutually holy nature of Jerusalem; the Muslim ruler may have also been executing a shrewd power play over a majority Christian population. However, the religious relevance to Jews did not deter the Muslim rulers from continuing persecution in the city that existed under Byzantine rule. Christian rulers had prohibited Jews from living or praying in the city.[93] Jerusalem's patriarch Sophronius tried to convince Umar to continue the prosecution of Jews. Less than twenty years earlier, the same patriarch presided over one of the worst massacres of Jews in the city's long history.

Umar's proclaimed protection of religious freedom may have been motivated by the demographics of the Levant and Jerusalem, itself. The Arab Muslims made up a very small minority within the largely Christian population. Disrespecting the status quo could have been catastrophic. Maintaining control of the strategically, politically, economically, and religiously significant city was more important than establishing *dhimmi* rule. It's possible, meanwhile, that his tolerance of Christians in Jerusalem was a reward for Christian cooperation under Muslim rule.

While we may never surmise the exact reason for Umar's compassion towards Christians in Jerusalem, there is record that he attempted to communicate his *dhimmi* policies to his successor. He told the caliph Uthman that he would send him "recommendations" about the People of the Book. He said, "It is necessary to faithfully keep the agreements made with them, fight to defend

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[92] Tritton, A.S. *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects.* London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1970. pg. 10.
[93] Spencer, Robert. ed. *The Myth of Islamic Tolerance.* Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2005. pg. 154.

them and not to impose upon them overwhelming burdens." His words reflected his actions; during his reign, he had released certain *dhimmis* who were punished for not paying the *jizya* tax.[94]

Christians participated under Muslim rule in relatively prominent positions. The first caliph of the Umayyad Empire, Mu'awiyah, had a court poet who was a Christian; Christians were some of the most linguistically adept people in the Levant. Meanwhile, the Umayyad caliph's wife was a Christian.[95] Throughout the reigns of the Rightly-Guided caliphs and the first Umayyad caliphs, a congenial relationship was fostered between Christians and many of the Arab Muslims. Influential Christians and Church leaders were willing and able to assist the Muslim rulers. A large portion of the Christian population was able to exercise their own will for the first time. The loosening of the Byzantine, Orthodox grip on a largely Monophysite population was perceived as an ethnic, religious victory. Meanwhile, the initial caliphs and the Umayyads held a broad, conciliatory view towards the majority population who, incidentally, were the greatest contributors to the tax base.[96]

But within the first half century of Muslim rule in the Levant, Christians living under Islam began noticing degradation in their treatment. While Qur'anic revelation and precedent dictated that women, the destitute, and children were exempt of the *jizya*, Syriac sources prove otherwise. In fact, as budgetary demands of the Muslim power increased, tax burden on the *dhimmi* also rose. For this reason, taxes were often demanded from children, widows, and even dead non-believers.[97] A Monophysite monk from a village in Mesopotamia recorded the measures that tax collectors went to retrieve their income; completed in 774 A.D., his work can be applied to the region of Palestine, as well. He recorded stories of Christian villages being laid to waste by tax collectors. Money was

[94] Ye'or, Bat. *The Dhimmi*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980. pg. 70.
[95] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 72.
[96] Ye'or, Bat. *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1996. pg. 69.
[97] Ibid. pg. 78.

often harvested from the population by means of torture and even crucifixion. In one case, an entire village was forced to remain in a church, without rations, until the tax demand was fulfilled.[98]

By the beginning of the new century (8th A.D.), large population shifts were occurring. Christians and Jews were moving away from their rural settlements, towns, and lands, seeking refuge from the economic and physical strife affecting them. Their destinations were the larger towns that harbored greater non-Muslim populations and offered better security. However, many of them were also heading to distant, isolated caves and mountains.[99] Most of these migrants were hoping to escape the tax burden and assertive Arab tax collectors that harassed them. Some were also escaping the violence, suppression, and loss that were inflicted upon them by the tribal leaders. As the Muslim ruler's primary source of taxes was shifting demographically, more repressive measures were needed if the revenue was to be sapped in the future. In 640, the local administration in Palestine ordered a census, per the demands of caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab.[100] Michael the Syrian wrote that all peoples living in Palestine were counted; their property, livestock, and assets were included in this census. Furthermore, identification records were issued. Christians and Jews without records on their person could be put to death. Meanwhile, anyone away from his place of birth could be sent back.[101]

Tax burden was just the beginning of their worries. Within a few generations, new challenges for the Christian population became to develop. With the ascension of the caliph Abd al-Malik in 685 A.D., Muslim primacy was on the rise.[102] This trend influenced the relationship between Byzantium and the Muslim realm, as well. Caliph Umar II, an Umayyad, challenged Christian theology and demeaned its believers when he communicated with Emperor Leo (r. 717-

[98] Ibid. pg. 74.
[99] Ibid. pg. 69.
[100] Ibid. pg. 77.
[101] Ibid. pg. 73.
[102] Betts, Robert Brenton. *Christians in the Arab East*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975. pg. 9.

741). Specifically, Umar II called Orthodox Christianity "imaginative", said it suffered from hubris, and mocked the concept of the Holy Trinity. He stated that the fractured and schismatic state of Christianity, then in seventy-two different sects, indicated its flawed and sinful ways. Furthermore, he echoed the Qur'an when he posited that Christians willingly corrupted their scriptures.[103] Emperor Leo responded by stating, "It is truly difficult to refute even the most palpable lie when the adversary dreams only of persisting in it." Al-Jahiz was a Muslim who prejudicially challenged Christian theology. He stated that it was perplexing that "learned people" would believe that a human, "who ate, drank, urinated, excreted […] and who later, as they assume, was crucified and killed, is Lord and Creator."[104]

Even the Islamic imprint upon the Holy Land, meant for the service to Allah and his believers, targeted the *dhimmis* at times. The Dome of the Rock is a magnificent building that sits atop the plinth of Solomon's Temple (in Arabic, it is the *Haram al-Sharif*) and signifies the rock from which Muhammad's winged horse propelled himself into heaven during the Prophet's *miraj*. Finished in 691 A.D., it was decorated primarily by Christian ceramicists, artisans, and scribes. The octagonal building is trimmed by two brilliant blue ribbons on which white stylized and intertwined Arabic script is written. The lettering is comprised of Qur'anic excerpts that indict Christianity of sin and apostasy. The passages also attack the Holy Trinity's doctrine and portray Jesus exclusively as a prophet of Islam.[105]

It is believed that much of the building done on the Temple Mount was done using debris from St. Mary's Church of Justinian. It and other churches were destroyed in 614 A.D. when Sassanid forces raided the region and laid the Holy Land in ruins.[106]

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[103] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 79.
[104] Ibid. pg. 80.
[105] Ibid. pg. 53.
[106] Le Strange, Guy. *Palestine Under the Moslems*. Beirut: Khayats, 1965. pg. 90.

There are varying, fragmented sources that relay the reality in Palestine. The voices of people unaffiliated with official positions or religious posts offer stories of strife and chaos. One chronicler wrote of the Abbasid Empire:

> The caliph moved into the western region [Palestine] in order to go to Jerusalem. He wreaked havoc, turned everything topsy turvy, terrorizing and devastating, to a degree worse than in Mesopotamia. He acted as Daniel had prophesied of the Antichrist himself. He turned the temple into a mosque, because the little that remained of Solomon's [Temple] became a mosque for the Arabs […]. He repaired the ruins of Jerusalem. He attacked men, took their property and livestock, particularly buffalos. He did not willingly leave anything to anyone whomsoever he was. […][107]

This treatment of the largely Christian and Jewish population was traumatizing within Palestine. It also ran paradoxically to other activities involving Christians in the Muslim realm. In fact, through the turn of the eighth century A.D., Christian leaders were still actively maintaining administrative functions. Their adept knowledge of Greek was no doubt the cause.[108] Very few Muslims had working knowledge of the official Byzantine language, let alone the numerous local Christian languages that included Syriac, Greek, Latin, and Aramaic. Therefore, the *dhimmis* were the only primer to unlocking the administrative and political traditions that would keep the growing Muslim empire afloat. They were a necessity, and for this reason they were utilized and tolerated.

As political institutions and traditions were adopted and implemented, it was possible for Arabic to be instated as the official language. As this transition occurred, most Christian officials remained in their respective posts. However, with the installation of caliph Umar II in 717 A.D., they were dismissed. The precedent of *dhimmi* officials, from that point on, would largely be dismissed. The most influential positions for Peoples of the Book would be limited to within their

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[107] Ye'or, Bat. *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1996. pg. 75.
[108] Ibid. pg. 80.

religious communities. Liaisons to the Muslim rulers, locally and regionally, would garner support and influence, as well. Michael the Syrian recorded the story of a Monophysite Christian who served an emir of Egypt. Athanasius was the Muslim's tutor and earned great wealth in his position. It is said he built churches with some of this money, which was no small feat. Many covenants with *dhimmi* populations banned building new churches; Athanasius' ability to do so indicates leniency that may have come from his high position and close relationship with Muslim leaders. Nevertheless, he was denounced in his life and the caliph demanded that Athanasius surrender a portion of his wealth; the caliph reasoned that, "we do not judge it fitting that a Christian should have such great wealth."[109] While Athanasius was able to maintain enough wealth to save himself from poverty, he had to relinquish a large amount of his earned wealth.

Christian treatment under Muslim rule was in decline barely a century after the initial Muslim conquest. Treatment of the Christian *dhimmis* in Palestine did not improve. In the latter half of the 9th century A.D., for example, a new minister of finance rose to power in Egypt. Before his ascension there, Muhammad al-Mudabbir was active in Palestine. He had tripled the *jizya* burden in the Holy Land. Furthermore, his tactics in tax collection were so harsh that it was said, "he filled the prisons in every place" with Christians and Jews who did not pay it.[110] Property was also confiscated by al-Mudabbir. However, there were certain recourses that Christians could take. In fact, certain *dhimmis* were able to recover confiscated houses of worship and miscellaneous property in the region, thanks to Christian connections that had the ear of influential officials and the caliph, himself. Unfortunately, this was the exception to the rule. It often cost the *dhimmis* certain amounts of money, as well.

Christians in Palestine were often encouraged to assimilate into the new Muslim order. Other times they were intimidated. Still other times they were forced through direct violence and

[109] Ibid. pg. 124.
[110] Ibid. pg. 84.

ultimatums. The implementation of a Muslim social order, for example, inflicted pervasive changes upon Christian lives in Palestine. Dress and attire were some of the most basic yet visible aspects that were affected. Christians were prohibited from wearing turbans, a head covering that was reserved for Muslims.[111] Christians instead wore a hat that had fabric wrapped around it on the sides, in imitation of the more respected headgear. Specific dress was dictated by the Muslims in power, as well. The color and form of their garments was determined by their respective denominations. Meanwhile, footwear was not neglected. Christians were required to wear red shoes, while other *dhimmis* had colors of their own.

Other forms of discrimination that affected Christians included *dhimmi* treatment in public baths. Non-Muslims were required to wear bells while in the baths; the small noise makers were used to identify *dhimmis* in the nude.[112]

Christians were sometimes forced to pay homage to Muslim beliefs and theological premises. The caliph Umar b. Abd al-Aziz, who reigned for three years in the first third of the 8th century A.D., ordered a guard to be present whenever Jews or Christians slaughtered animals.[113] The guard was to proclaim the name of Allah and his Holy Prophet Muhammad during the ritual, so as to confirm the hegemony of the final revelation.

Christian holy places did not enjoy stable security under Muslim rule. In fact, there are many historical records indicating that they were often targets of *dhimmi* oppression and ill-will. In the latter half of the 10th century A.D., the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was targeted by such attacks. Its gates on the eastern side, as well as part of a cloister there, were burnt and sacked.[114] Three decades after the initial attack, it was burnt again. The Holy Sepulchre is the holiest site in Christianity and canonizes the location of Jesus' burial and resurrection. The massive complex

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[111] Ibid. pg. 378.
[112] Ibid. pg. 96.
[113] Ye'or, Bat. *The Dhimmi*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980. pg. 182.
[114] Tritton, A.S. *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects.* London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1970. pg. 51, 52.

encloses many of the last Stations of the Cross, in fact. However, it has been found that ever since the first Muslim contact with Jerusalem, the Church has been approached and treated with disdain. A contrived Arabic label for the Church was *Kanisat al-Qumamah*, which means "The Church of the Sweepings" or "The Church of the Dunghill."[115] The witticism used a perverted form of *Qayamah*, or "Resurrection," which was the name given to the holy place by Eastern Christians.

Some Muslims respected the churches in the region and reveled in the beauty of the Holy Sepulchre. Mukaddasi, for example, wrote in the 10th century about his father's admiration for the "beautiful churches still belonging to" Christians; he viewed them to be "enchantingly fair" and full of "splendour."[116] Their existence so moved him to build mosques that exceeded them in beauty, in order to "prevent [Muslims] regarding these" of Christian creation.

There were events that brought the Christian *dhimmi* and the Muslims in Palestine together, meanwhile. In the fall, according to the solar calendar, there was an annual festival in Jerusalem focusing on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Christians ventured from throughout the region, traveling the roads of Palestine, in order to converge on their holiest site. Muslims were often enthralled by the festival and could be found assembling around the Christian crowds, in the hopes of witnessing the ceremonies and candle laden celebrations.[117] Muslim records in Syria indicate that there were seven Christian feasts that were observed by Muslims, as well. They often acted as markers of the passing seasons. However, they were also religiously-based and found their purpose in Christian doctrine. Festivals included Easter, which marked the near year at the vernal equinox. Meanwhile, the "Feast of the Cross" was celebrated in conjunction with the harvesting of grapes and the feast of Lydda was in conjunction with planting spring fields.[118]

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[115] Le Strange, Guy. *Palestine Under the Moslems*. Beirut: Khayats, 1965. pg. 202.
[116] Ibid. pg. 117.
[117] Ibid. pg. 203.
[118] Ibid. pg. 21.

Christians, at the time of the Muslim invasions, maintained a variety of jobs, excelled in various trades, and followed numerous vocations. Many Christians excelled in the realm of linguistics. They were active as scribes and translators, delving into contemporary and ancient texts.[119] Their subjects were secular and religious. The latter track led many Christians into religious jobs and vocations. The local Eastern Christian denominations and sects often maintained their own clergy; laypeople could find their way into the religious hierarchy. Other Christians were physicians.[120] Some invested their time and efforts into the study of sciences and the letters. Still others pursued agrarian lifestyles. The more rural Christian population tended to their lands, often planting olive trees and miscellaneous plants. They tended livestock that included sheep and goats.

Generally speaking, there were no catastrophic alterations to Christian professions following the Muslim invasions. Christians and other *dhimmis* were dismissed from governmental service by early caliphs. However, there were no direct limitations to religious, academic, or scientific positions. Meanwhile, there were no explicit barriers imposed on the rural Christian farmers and agrarian families. Their productivity was desired by the Muslim power and the local tribal leaders for many reasons, supply of sustainable food resources being the most pressing. The local Arab Muslim leaders desired prosperity, for it meant their tax farming and collection of the *ata* and *jizya* would be lucrative.

Nevertheless, there were many reasons why Christian lifestyles, society, economic patterns, and demographics went through great changes after the seventh century A.D. The dramatic tax burden that was levied on the Christian populations, especially in the rural villages, was one cause for strife. The intimidation, threats, and demographic shifts were direct results of the system that included the *jizya* and the *ata*. By the middle of the 8th century A.D., in fact, the regions of

[119] Ibid. pg. 22.
[120] Ibid. pg. 22.

Palestine and Syria were plagued by famine.[121] Once productive lands were abandoned by exploited Christians; they left fallow fields and abandoned churches from southern Gaza to Hebron.

Another significant event that affected Christians in the region was the iconoclast conflict of the eighth century A.D. Two successive Byzantine emperors, Leo III and Constantine V, sought to end the veneration of icons in their religion. Their actions mirrored actions of caliph Yazid II, their contemporary, who openly attacked Christian imagery and use of the human form. From its formation, Islam had abhorred icons and strictly forbade the iconography in religious settings. Their refusal to draw Muhammad's face is, perhaps, the most well-known of their artistic premises. But while a council in Nicaea in 787 reestablished veneration of images, the conflict unsettled Christian communities throughout Byzantium and the Muslim-controlled Levant.[122]

The quality of life and condition of Christians in Palestine was neither a simple nor a static affair. The impact of the Muslim conquest upon their population, as well as the residual treatment by their new rulers, varied greatly throughout history. How individual Christians faired depended on a wide number of variables. Location, assets, social position, education, and affiliation with both political and religious institutions were some of these determining factors. Christians faired poorly in the southern stretches of Palestine and the Negev, as did other *dhimmi* populations. Their heavily agrarian lifestyle was overwhelmed with the arrival of Arab Muslim tribes. These new local administrators used their mobility to influence large swaths of land. The *bedu* demanded much of the peoples they taxed and, from time to time, pillaged. Within decades of implementing this new system, Muslim administrators recognized that famine, strife, and migration were holding the region hostage.

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[121] Ye'or, Bat. *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1996. pg. 102.
[122] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 80-82.

The tribal Arab Muslim system adversely affected areas in central Palestine, as well, and even expanses in modern-day Iraq and Syria. Meanwhile, Christians living in the larger towns and cities adapted to changes, too. Muslim administrators initially allowed Christians to maintain their influential presence in official positions and governmental capacities. However, this changed as Arab Muslims learned the administrative systems and were able to make the structure their own. Christians and Jews kept their monopoly in the linguistic realm, working as scribes, translators, poets, philosophers, and secretaries.

The Christian communities in Palestine turned inward with the Islamic conquest. Influence and wealth was most easily obtained when they cooperated with the Muslim establishment. For this reason, the most renowned Christians of the day were clergy, translators, and officials who were willing and able to work with the Islamic administration. But as decades and centuries passed, *dhimmi* activity was limited. The influence that was garnered was only applicable within their communities. Those *dhimmi* communities were identified by religion and, as such, religious leaders garnered the most power. They also widened the breadth of their responsibilities. An inevitable consequence of this, meanwhile, was the further separation of the different denominations and sects of the Eastern Christian community. Their territoriality and defensiveness over their respective identities – buried deep within ethnicity, language, doctrine, and memory – inhibited their ability to unite and cooperate when it was most necessary.

In a twist of tragic yet moral irony, Christian populations often became victims of the same repressive, prejudicial policies that Byzantium inflicted upon Jews. The *jizya*, restrictions in public settings, clothing requirements, public humiliation, and dehumanizing tactics were adopted from Byzantium and were used with refined ferocity under Islam. Christians had to adapt and live under the new system. It offered a decline in intra-Christian struggle that was common under Byzantine rule. However, Islam denigrated Christians, Jews, and other *dhimmis* under the hegemonic,

righteous, and ordained word of God. The covenants discussed earlier were manifestations of this new reality. Tax burden under the *jizya*, as well as the "humbling" that is required according the Qur'an, served as a very real indication of Christianity's status under Islam. Protection was offered, but it was also required if Christians wanted to live with a semblance of normalcy. And even when one paid the *jizya*, humiliation and was commonplace. Condescending treatment of Christians in Palestine, under Islam, was perhaps not as confrontational as were the schismatic battles under Byzantium. However, a pervasive disdain for Christians and non-believers affected the communities culturally and psychologically. Christians found themselves sustaining themselves in Palestine. But as the historian Kenneth Cragg wrote, "The contractual basis of security under Islam disallowed more than internal survival."[123] Christians were struggling to maintain a cohesive identity and perpetuate healthy communal endurance. They now found themselves in a society that rarely attempted to convert or threaten them overtly. However, their Muslim neighbors looked upon them with disdain and dismissed the validity of their religious beliefs. This disrespect of their most fundamental identity had pervasive effects upon self-perception and the Christian psyche. *Dhimmi* status inhibited their potential to continue their past status, develop further influence, and even combat degradation in their communal status.

[123] Ibid. pg. 71.

Chapter Six:

Palestinian Christians through the Fourteenth Century

As the first millennium of Christianity ended, the Christians in the Holy Land were experiencing pervasive changes in their ways of life. The first thousand years of the second great Abrahamic religion witnessed tremendous growth, multi-ethnic proselytizing, great schisms, doctrinal conflicts, and the spread of unprecedented theological concepts. The region of Jesus' life had become a center of heterogeneous Christian communities. Eventually, it fell under the command of Muslim forces. The followers of Islam recognized Jesus as a prophet, but their holy book portrayed his followers as erring beings who misinterpreted – and worse, deliberately perverted – God's revealed message. And while the Muslim powers allowed a substantial level of Christian *dhimmi* autonomy and inclusion in society, there was a clear hierarchy that inhibited Christians from maintaining an earlier achieved hegemony.

The history of Christianity in the Holy Land was most influenced by the ruling bodies in the region. Control over Palestine passed through many different hands, belonging to different religions, in the second millennium A.D. Through the progression, indigenous Christians became subject to the whim and will of their arbiters. Following periods of general decay and instability under the Abbasids, Palestine was grasped by the expanding Fatimid Caliphate centered in Cairo. This transition took place in the early half of the tenth century A.D. General consensus states that

the Fatimids treated *dhimmi* communities – including those in Palestine – with greater degrees of liberty and autonomy available within the hierarchy of Islam.[124]

One exception was the rule of Caliph al-Hakim, who ruled from 996 to 1021 A.D. In a period of twenty four years, Hakim severely oppressed the *dhimmis* under Fatimid rule. Christians living in the Holy Land were treated with particular malice. Records indicate that conflict arose when Muslims in Jerusalem accused the Christians of constructing a new dome over the Holy Sepulchre that was higher than the Dome of the Rock.[125] The patriarch Thomas was incarcerated over the charges, but was released when challenges to the charges revealed holes in their story. However, such positive ends were not the norm for the *dhimmis.* Eutychius wrote that Muslims had entered the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and used it for prayers. The seemingly deferent act provoked a negative memory for Christians, however. The Muslims removed Christian mosaics and installed their own inscriptions within the building commemorating the location of Jesus' birth.[126]

The persecution of Christians included many forced conversions to Islam.[127] Caliph Hakim also ordered one of the most catastrophic punishments upon Christianity within the Holy Land. At the turn of the fifth century of the *hijra* calendar, approximately 1010 A.D., Hakim ordered all churches in his dominions to be leveled. Within five years, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was destroyed "to the roots" and was heavily looted.[128] In two decades, under Caliph Zahir, the Holy Sepulchre was allowed to be restored.

The latter half of the eleventh century A.D. witnessed the invasion of Seljuk Turkish forces within the Mesopotamia and the Levant. In Palestine, battles between the Seljuks and the Fatimids

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[124] Ye'or, Bat. *The Dhimmi*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980. pg. 70.
[125] Tritton, A.S. *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects.* London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1970. pg. 49, 50.
[126] Ibid. pg. 52.
[127] Runciman, Sir Steven. *The Historic Role of the Christian Arabs of Palestine*. London: Longman for the University of Essex, 1969. pg. 9.
[128] Tritton, A.S. *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects.* London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1970. pg. 54.

raged for the better part of two decades. The local populations often suffered from the general chaos, violence, and depleted resources that accompanied wars, but the Christian population did not seem to suffer more than others.[129] While Jerusalem fell to both forces many times over the course of the conflict, the walled city remained intact. In the end, the arrival of Seljuk supremacy did not usher in any remarkable changes for the Christians.

The next chapter in Palestine was written when the Crusaders first appeared, taking Jerusalem and the Holy Land in 1099 A.D. When the Crusader forces entered the Holy Land, the general homeostasis of various Christian communities went under drastic changes. By that time, the Christian population in the Levant and Egypt had decreased dramatically and Arabic was quickly replacing vernaculars (ie. Coptic and Aramaic dialects) that were used by the indigenous populations.[130] However, most Christian communities boasted sheltered, protected bloodlines; Palestine could still be considered a mainly Christian region. The Muslim prohibition of marriage with non-Muslim males, as well as self-instigated refusals to mingle with other ethno-religious communities, produced myriad homogeneous pockets within the region. Specific denominations and sects of Christians also tended to localize themselves in certain areas.

The Orthodox followers tended to congregate in urban locales; Jerusalem was particularly popular, as a patriarchate was located there. This was of great importance, for through the first millennium of Christianity, the majority of Christians in Palestine followed the Orthodox doctrine.[131] The remaining Jacobites – much of their population had converted to Islam – could generally be found towards the north and west, often seeking solace on the coast near modern day

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[129] Runciman, Sir Steven. *The Historic Role of the Christian Arabs of Palestine*. London: Longman for the University of Essex, 1969. pg. 10.
[130] Betts, Robert Brenton. *Christians in the Arab East.* Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975. pg. 11.
[131] Runciman, Sir Steven. *The Historic Role of the Christian Arabs of Palestine*. London: Longman for the University of Essex, 1969. pg. 8.

Haifa.[132] Monophysites such as Copts and Nestorians, meanwhile, generally populated the more rural regions, especially in the south near the Negev. The Orthodox believers followed the head of their church, in Constantinople, while respecting the hierarchy of patriarchates in their respective regions. Other non-Orthodox denominations, meanwhile, predominantly put their faith in local community and religious leaders. The localized administration allowed them to negotiate more intimately with the Muslim rulers.

The Latin Crusaders recognized that the Palestinian Christians would be their closest allies and confidants, out of all the indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, there was a certain level of skepticism, caution, and distain that tainted their relations. When the local Christian population outnumbered the Crusaders, the latter were resigned to work with the "heretics," which included "Greeks, Armenians, Syrians, and Jacobites."[133] Doctrinal differences continued to impair unity between the different denominations, but cooperation did exist. At times, Palestinian Christians were even granted immediate benefits for their religious beliefs. When the armies of the First Crusade laid siege to Jerusalem in 1099, the indigenous Christians were processed out of the city safely, while local Muslims and Jews became targets of mass killings and vengeful acts under the banner of heaven.[134]

Meanwhile, the integrity of Christian bloodlines was greatly impacted by the arrival of the Crusaders. The male invaders from Europe found comfort in the arms of many indigenous Christian women. Intermarriage, both through love and exploitation, propagated a new category of Christian living in Palestine; "Turcopules" – meaning 'children of Turks' – became the offspring of

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[132] Attie, Caroline Camille. *The Greek Orthodox Community in Lebanon: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives.* The University of Texas at Austin, 1988. pg. 43.
[133] Joseph, John. *Muslim-Christian Relations and Inter-Christian Rivalries in the Middle East*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1983. pg. 15.
[134] Runciman, Sir Steven. *The Historic Role of the Christian Arabs of Palestine*. London: Longman for the University of Essex, 1969. pg. 10.

these heterogeneous relationships.[135] This population tended to pursue the traditions and religion of its mothers. Such a trend indicates that Crusaders generally detached themselves from any responsibilities or connection to these children. Resentment sprang prejudice founded in ethnic discrimination and religious condescension. Writing on the issue, Kenneth Cragg mentioned, "While inter-Christian, it still fell foul of Latin prejudice. Melchites were thought of as *suriani*, and Jacobites, Maronites, and others as 'oriental.' A prejudice of race [ousted] an affinity of faith."[136] This phenomenon jumpstarted new levels of communal disorganization and diffusion that continued throughout the second millennium of Christianity.

Generally, through these demographic permutations, the Christian population maintained its place in the economic sphere. They contributed to the artisan and craftsman trades, participated heavily in language and translation realms, and excelled in the studies of law and the sciences.[137] However, Christians experienced major shifts within the social realm. In Jerusalem, Christian rule eclipsed four centuries of Muslim hegemony nearly overnight. The Dome of the Rock, which was the third holiest site in Islam and had commanded reverence from all citizens, was immediately taken by the Knights Templar, re-interpreted to be a Christian temple, and a cross was put atop its golden dome.[138] Likewise, the al-Aqsa Mosque was occupied. Preferences in Palestine were dramatically altered and Muslims quickly found themselves second-class citizens under an occupier's rule.

Soon after the conquest of Jerusalem, the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem was proclaimed. The new ruling body was inaugurated under the auspices of the Pope. The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem oversaw a political realm that stretched over a majority of Palestine, spreading into parts of modern

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[135] Ibid. pg. 12.
[136] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 111.
[137] Attie, Caroline Camille. *The Greek Orthodox Community in Lebanon: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives.* The University of Texas at Austin, 1988. pg. 43.
[138] Le Strange, Guy. *Palestine Under the Moslems*. Beirut: Khayats, 1965. pg. 130.

day Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. The Latin Kingdom was the first Christian or European body to preside over the Holy Land. Its preference of Roman Catholicism was clear. Meanwhile, Eastern Orthodox believers were openly prosecuted and the patriarch of Jerusalem found the need to emigrate to Constantinople.[139]

One would be in error to think that the indigenous Christians were embraced while the non-Christians were ostracized. Many Crusaders looked down upon the local Christian populations, seeing them as barbarous, distant cousins who lacked the civilized qualities of European Christians. The local populations did not benefit from their striking resemblance to other ethno-religious communities of Palestine, either. It was very easy for the Crusaders to dismiss their religious similarities, point-blank, because of physical features. Language barriers further handicapped indigenous Christians. By the eleventh century, the Arabic language was gaining ground with local Christian lay leaders and scribes, while Syriac and Aramaic dialects were still most popular among the greater populace.

Despite its dramatic effect on the political and social dimensions in Palestine, the Latin Kingdom lasted barely two centuries. During its tenure, it established new institutions and influences upon the indigenous populations. Perhaps the most intriguing of these were the Crusaders settlements, castles, and pilgrimage routes that ran from the Mediterranean coast to the holy sites. A Persian pilgrim named Nasir-I Khusrau, traveling to Jerusalem in 1047 A.D. noted that a high number of pilgrims from "Rum" visited the holy sites annually.[140] The footprint of European pilgrims and Crusaders was well established.

Similarly to the occupiers preceding them, the Crusaders and their Latin Kingdom were inconsistent in their treatment of the indigenous peoples of Palestine. While some Christian communities benefited from an allied cooperation with Rome, others were treated poorly and even

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[139] Hopwood, Derek. *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine 1843-1914.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969. pg. 20.
[140] Le Strange, Guy. *Palestine Under the Moslems*. Beirut: Khayats, 1965. pg. 204, 205.

prosecuted. Ethnic and religious discrepancies were the roots of these seemingly arbitrary actions. The Melkite population, for example, was one community that publicly prayed in Jerusalem for Muslim success during Saladin's siege of the city in 1187.[141] Nonetheless, a majority of the city's population fought the Muslim forces fiercely.

When Saladin's forces took Jerusalem and, subsequently, the greater region around it, there was a strong anti-Latin backlash. The Orthodox Church participated largely in this movement.[142] The conflict necessarily conflagrated issues surrounding religion and heightened religion's stigma within Palestine. Saladin reconstituted a level of self-governance for local Christian communities that had been deprived of them by the Crusading kingdom.[143] They also regained control of many churches and shrines. Despite the bad blood between local and Crusading Christians, there were some European, Latin Christians who sought to continue their link with the region. Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen was an admirer of Arab culture and fostered a relationship with the cousin of Saladin. In 1229 A.D. Frederick II secured control of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, and a narrow strip of land leading to the Mediterranean. Frederick II established power over land necessary to continue safe pilgrimages to the Holy Land. However, his adoration of things Arab and Muslim provoked resentment and wrath from the Papacy. Furthermore, his heretical statements and beliefs led to his excommunication by Pope Gregory IX; the patriarch in Jerusalem also prohibited his pilgrims from entering the city.[144]

In a matter of decades following Saladin's conquest of Jerusalem and the region of Palestine, the Mongol forces that were sweeping throughout the region, sacking Baghdad and dominating resistance had reached the Holy Land. It appears that when the Mongols first won

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[141] Betts, Robert Brenton. *Christians in the Arab East*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975. pg. 13.
[142] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 104.
[143] Runciman, Sir Steven. *The Historic Role of the Christian Arabs of Palestine*. London: University of Essex, 1969. pg. 12.
[144] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991.. pg. 104.

possession of the region, Christian populations were often favored. This may have been a result of Mongol interest in the religion. It could have also been based on the assumed disenfranchisement and discontent of the Christians; conquerors often seek assistance from the dispossessed in order to wrest control from former powers. Whatever the reason, some Mongols took Christian wives, while others were affected by earlier proselytizing of Nestorians in Asia.[145] There are indications that Christians in Damascus publicly celebrated the Mongol victory over the Muslims. Maqrizi, a historian from the era, noted that Christians were drinking wine in the streets during Ramadan and treated their Muslim neighbors with a level of disrespect that was often shown to them. Some confidently stated that, "the true faith, the faith of the Messiah, is today triumphant."[146]

Yet like the recent forces that dramatically grasped control of Palestine before them, the Mongols lost their grip upon the Holy Land, quickly. By the latter half of the thirteenth century, the Mamluk Empire sent its forces from its capital in Cairo and conquered the entire Levant. Stretching into modern day Turkey, their armies swept through Palestine and gripped the region firmly. Their forces were, at times, allowed to pass through Crusader territory, in order to stave off what was seen as the greater Mongol threat. However, churches in Nazareth were ransacked at the time; some were simply destroyed. *Dhimmis* were also prohibited from entering Abraham's resting place in Hebron. [147]

Generally speaking, the Mamluks treated indigenous Christians with varying levels of contempt. Some villages were forced to convert to Islam under the Mamluks, while church properties were confiscated when the burden of *dhimmi* taxes grew too great. The Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem was exploited of its wealth, meanwhile. The silks and golden chalices that

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[145] Joseph, John. *Muslim-Christian Relations and Inter-Christian Rivalries in the Middle East*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1983. pg. 16.
[146] Ibid. pg. 17.
[147] Tritton, A.S. *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects.* London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1970. pg. 58, 110.

the church once used had to be sold through the years.[148] Furthermore, Saladin's decision to encourage Muslim immigration into Palestine had produced changes in demographics. Christian populations continued to shrink in proportion to Muslims. This trend continued through the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Through all of the battles, shifts of power, and ideological revisions, the Christian populations in Palestine maintained pride in their identities. Orthodox believers remained active within the hierarchy of their patriarch. Non-orthodox sects maintained communal bonds and exclusivity. Latin Orthodox, meanwhile, maintained their loyalties to the Pope and revered him from afar. The different communities, meanwhile, shared a recurring satisfaction in their identity and memory. Their communities perpetuated themselves despite external factors. However, their confidence in the Christian identity may have contributed to moments of persecution or perpetual marginalization. The myriad stories of public conflicts, intimidation, and violence directed at the Christian minorities almost always developed out of anger towards boisterous Christians. Direct persecution of Christians most often occurred when they did not show restraint within the hierarchical system implemented upon them.[149]

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[148] Runciman, Sir Steven. *The Historic Role of the Christian Arabs of Palestine*. London: University of Essex, 1969. pg. 12.

[149] Tritton, A.S. *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects.* London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1970. pg. 122.

Chapter Seven:
Palestinian Christians under the Ottomans

The Christian population in Palestine was fragmented doctrinally, geographically, and politically at the turn of the sixteenth century. The proud Christians maintained their lifestyles, vocations, memories, and identities despite their disunity. The Muslim majority, with which they lived, allowed them varying degrees of autonomy and subsistence. Infrequently, however, outbreaks of resentment, anger, and contempt erupted when Christians were perceived to have crossed a line. So Christians maintained various, oftentimes influential positions in society. But their position was always eligible for inspection, and they were expected to maintain themselves within parameters.

The invading power that would have the longest, and, perhaps, most influential effect on Palestine arrived in 1517 A.D. At that time, Ottoman Turkish forces, under the command of Sultan Selim I, conquered Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, and put to rest the Mamluk Empire.[150] The Ottomans brought with them political institutions that pertained to religious minorities. Specifically, they had *dhimmi* policies that partitioned different communities into managerial *millets.* These administrative entities compartmentalized the communities that the Empire ruled over and made implementation easier. Meanwhile, the Orthodox Patriarch in Constantinople was

[150] Runciman, Sir Steven. *The Historic Role of the Christian Arabs of Palestine*. London: University of Essex, 1969. pg. 13.

used as an arm of the Sultan's intentions. Thus Constantinople gained significantly greater influence over the Orthodox believers in Palestine; Jerusalem's Patriarch now dealt directly, politically and religiously, with the capital city.[151] Furthermore, all laypeople of the Orthodox faith fell under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox *millet*. Their *millet* maintained religious autonomy and exercised certain executive and judicial powers.

Non-Orthodox sects, save the Chalcedonian, were lumped together under the Ottoman administrative *millet* title of "Armenian." The ethnic group was one of the most numerous and visible Monophysite communities in the Empire. For that reason, their name was erroneously used to lump numerous doctrinal and ethnic communities together, to the benefit of Ottoman efficiency.[152] Long established rivalries and theological contentions went unrecognized by governing bodies. Glossing over the intricacies of these Christian communities created conflicts as well as deceiving senses of homogeneity. Through all of this, the Orthodox Church was once again elevated over other Christian communities and became the sole Christian representative in the Empire. Furthermore, the revived contact between Constantinople and the Patriarchate in Jerusalem pumped new strength into Orthodox influence in Palestine.

The *millet* system, by design, compartmentalized and marginalized minority communities like the myriad Christian sects. *Millets* were allowed to manage their own internal laws, religious issues, and private concerns; Christians lived with a level of autonomy that was seldom seen. Local issues were usually left to local clergy and ruling bodies, to the benefit of Christian communities. However, equity was not an automatic product of this system. Local clergy were ultimately responsible to the imperial system above them. Efficiency and hierarchy to central governance were the goals of the *millet* system. Since all non-Orthodox sects were lumped under the Armenian Catholicos body, different ethno-religious communities struggled to live under a rigid, unfamiliar

[151] Hopwood, Derek. *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine 1843-1914.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969. pg. 18.
[152] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 117.

structure.[153] Meanwhile, the only direct Ottoman administrative presence in the provinces, like Palestine, were *walis* appointed by the Sultan.[154] These officials oversaw local garrison bodies, performed various ancillary tasks when needed, and managed the collection of taxes. But even these minor officials had limited breadths. They were only found in larger urban centers. Other regions maintained themselves under local autonomy and were allowed to perpetuate long lines of familial and tribal dynasties. Overall, therefore, the Christian communities were able to maintain significant levels of autonomy. They also grew to play increasing roles in the economic and cultural spheres in Palestine. They were more empowered than they had been in centuries.

Administrative systems like the *millet* were efficient and convenient ways for the Ottomans to maintain control over their vast imperial holdings and a remarkably varied population. However, the *millet* emphasized the implicit and pragmatic exercise of tying identity to religious beliefs. Thus, national ties became linked with the dogmatic principles people held their faith in. This a-rational foundation escalated conflicts, both subconscious and manifested, between different ethno-religious communities. When loyalties had to be drawn, religion often influenced the results. Albert Hourani wrote:

> Since for Moslems and Christians alike consciousness of belonging to a religious community was the basis of political and social obligation, both were very conscious of not belonging to other communities; and the sense of distinctiveness led easily to suspicion and dislike.[155]

Awareness of religious identity became heightened as political, economic, and social decisions were tied to it. The Ottoman administrative systems were built for secular, efficient purposes. But in the process of their use, they entrenched the relevance of religious identity. Necessarily, as one becomes more aware of who they are, they also know what they are not. Caution, suspicion,

[153] Ibid. pg. 118.
[154] Hourani, A. H. *Minorities in the Arab World*. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947. pg. 19.
[155] Attie, Caroline Camille. *The Greek Orthodox Community in Lebanon: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives.* The University of Texas at Austin, 1988. pg. 52.

prejudice, and even militancy start to grow between communities of different beliefs when those beliefs define their identity.

An interesting development from Ottoman control over Palestine was the shift in the ethnicity of Orthodox clergy. Arab Christians enjoyed a majority within the Patriarchate in Jerusalem for many years. But with the renewed link to Constantinople, Greek clergy steadily replaced the more local ethnic voice.[156] The official shift away from local, Arab clergy represented a long, gradual trend that was systemic throughout the Orthodox Church in Palestine. Throughout Ottoman rule, the Orthodox Church neglected its arm in the Holy Land. It was not appreciated as an important, primary focus of the church's time, efforts, or wealth. A majority of Orthodox clergy in the region lived in monasteries and did not make efforts to do mission work or accomplish other religious duties. It was very difficult for the church to gain income. For this reason, many of the churches throughout Palestine were impoverished and struggled to maintain themselves.[157]

A general state of poverty was pervasive among Christians, especially the Orthodox, living in the rural villages of the Holy Land.[158] Preceding centuries of plundering, repression, and neglect under various occupiers had already debilitated those communities. Observers noted that churches were in disrepair and had very few furnishings or altar decorations. In fact, some priests kept livestock in their churches; their humble lifestyle and crippled churches mixed in this show of disadvantage. Derek Hopwood, a historian of Russian Orthodox presence in the region, noted that "the religious life of the Orthodox Arabs had languished through neglect by the Greek hierarchy, an inadequate priesthood and centuries of Muslim rule."[159]

Centuries of heterodox lifestyles and interaction with other ethno-religious communities also had tremendous influence on the Christian communities. Many Muslim characteristics were used

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[156] Hopwood, Derek. *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine 1843-1914.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969. pg. 21.
[157] Ibid. pg. 24.
[158] Ibid. pg. 26, 27.
[159] Ibid. pg. 29.

by the Christian populace, Orthodox and otherwise. Certain women chose to wear the burka and adopted segregation practices that were common among Muslim and Jewish neighbors. Common use of Arabic accelerated the diffusion, and the synthesis of ideas was quite common. The product of these developments was a Christian community whose culture was unique in comparison with the Christians found outside of the Holy Land. Their heterogeneous character was unique to Palestine. It created a rich culture. It also created contested attributes that were seen as apostate and perverted by foreign Christians. Latin Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and many pilgrims to Palestine viewed the local Christians as flawed and primitive. They muddled the new covenant with Arab culture and pagan principles. Even in the eyes of their brothers in Christendom, the Christian communities in Palestine were seen as outsiders.

In the case of Orthodox Christians, this disconnect with the greater Christian community, as well as their minority status within Palestine, led the local population to trends of introversion and seclusion. Many elected to pursue their lives in close communion with the local parishes, under the Jerusalem patriarch. Many continued a tradition of living in structures owned and maintained by the church, others received rations of food.[160] The Orthodox population near Jerusalem received alms and received any available education through church-run schools.

The *millet* system, divisions within the Palestinian Christian communities, minority status, and introverted religious identity led to communities that functioned and sustained themselves *through* the church, not with it. It is important to recognize, meanwhile, that these religious communities were, by and large, increasingly heterogeneous in character. This is not to say that they mingled with other Christian denominations or were inclusive when dealing with non-Christian neighbors. Rather, they were pervasively influenced by the majority around them. Distinct labels of religion had tremendous influence on how peoples were governed and treated. Nevertheless, the

[160] Ibid. pg. 21, 28.

labels glossed over the truths of diffusion and synthesis that dominated Palestine. As identity became entrenched, beliefs and traditions were followed with great conviction, often without knowledge of purpose or meaning.[161] The organic growth and contact of different communities was stunted by administrative labels. Despite observations that "Arab Muslims and Christians are exactly the same in Palestine – in language, customs and vices," divisions were perpetuated.

[161] Ibid. pg. 29.

Chapter Eight:
Palestinian Christians at a Crossroads

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw major developments within Palestine. Many Christian communities indigenous to the Holy Land had survived centuries of invasions, power shifts, diffusion, and conflicts over identity. Others had diminished, diffused, or completely vanished from Palestine. The population trends in the region offer an important glimpse at societal patterns. By the end of the Mamluk period in the Levant, the Christian population had plummeted to its lowest level to that point. Christians made up approximately seven percent of the population. An Ottoman census, of sorts, was taken in the latter half of the sixteenth century; its focus was on the Fertile Crescent. Official counting indicated that Christians constituted a little less than ten percent of the total population.[162] From that point forward, there was a constant increase in the Christian population. By 1914, in fact, Christians made up thirty-three percent of the population in Greater Syria (this includes modern-day Lebanon, Syria, and Israel-Palestine).[163]

These vague concepts of size do not indicate the size of specific Christian communities or denominations. They also fail to indicate any shifts in members, the likes of which were seen as missions and proselytizing grew. Other records do indicate, however, that the Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem witnessed a decline in members. It is believed that by 1840 there were

[162] Pacini, Andrea. ed. *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. pg. 49.
[163] Ibid. pg. 52.

approximately 20,000 Orthodox members left. They were "scattered" in about seventy towns through Palestine and the East Bank of the Jordan.[164] Jerusalem continued to be the population center for their church, though they only represented about eight percent of its citizens. In fact, the Orthodox did not hold a majority in any village, town, or city.

Inversely, Russian sources indicate that the Latin Catholic and Uniate populations increased greatly during the nineteenth century. In period of forty years, 1840 to 1880, the Patriarchate in Jerusalem grew from 3,000 to 13,000.[165] Different trends seem to indicate that the Christian population in Palestine was not in crisis by the nineteenth century. Numbers were growing steadily. More impressive, perhaps, is the fact that the percentage of total population that was Christian more or less maintained itself, despite Ottoman support of Muslim migration into the region. Broadly speaking, the Christian communities in Palestine were fairing as well as they ever had since the seventh century. In 1832, when the Ottoman vassal Ibrahim Pasha occupied the area as part of a power feud with Constantinople, he treated the Christian population with respect. Observations in Lebanon, for example, indicated that Christians were able to break out of *dhimmi* restrictions over dress and the use of horses.[166] They also made new inroads in trade and commerce; this may have also been a product of European influence and partiality.

Of the victims from this era, most were Monophysite sects that were adversely affected by the Orthodox rise under the Ottomans. Jacobites, for example, had enjoyed an upswing under the Mamluks; they were the Monophysite community that was most favored under the otherwise repressive regime.[167] By the second millennium A.D. they had population centers in Jerusalem and Nablus, as well as sparse rural villages. But with the Ottoman and Orthodox hegemony in the Holy

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[164] Hopwood, Derek. *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine 1843-1914.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969. pg. 19.
[165] Ibid. pg. 31.
[166] Attie, Caroline Camille. *The Greek Orthodox Community in Lebanon: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives.* The University of Texas at Austin, 1988. pg. 58.
[167] Joseph, John. *Muslim-Christian Relations and Inter-Christian Rivalries in the Middle East.* Albany: SUNY Press, 1983. pg. 118.

Land coming in the sixteenth century, many Monophysite sects suffered from a tax burden levied against them.

The Monophysites were seen as heretics in the eyes of the Orthodox Christians. Groups like the Nestorians and Gregorians were forced to "forsake their quarter" in Jerusalem in the seventeenth century. Meanwhile, it was noted that by the nineteenth century followers of the Coptic and Abyssinian doctrines were "purely exotic communities, having no native adherents" in the Holy Land.[168] The communities that diminished and disappeared were victims of myriad issues. These included low birth rates, limitations stemming from marriage exclusivity, forced conversions, intimidation, and violence at the hand of *dhimmi* treatment and persecution, emigration, and the proselytizing of other religions.

By the eighteenth century, Christianity in Palestine was transitioning in character. As the Monophysite sects were finding themselves increasingly marginalized and even exploited by other Christian communities and the governing institutions, the Orthodox Church was the most influential Christian body. However, there were new players getting involved. These included new efforts made by the Latin Catholics. Meanwhile, foreign nations were becoming increasingly occupied with the politics of ethno-religious communities in the Levant.

Starting in the sixteenth century, many rising European powers more greatly influenced the Ottoman Empire. Internally, they were allowed to be granted protector status for their citizens; this was part of the greater development of the economically based Capitulations.[169] This power expanded, oftentimes, to include communities with which they empathized or shared religious beliefs. In the charter of the English Levant Company, for example, there was a distinct intention to provide "relief to many Christians that be or may happen to be in the thralldom of necessity." The peace and health of Christian communities was cited as an influence upon commercial success.

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[168] Ibid. pg. 118.
[169] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 122.

The renewed European and Latin Catholic influence upon Palestine had a remarkable effect upon the indigenous Christian population. The presence of foreign consulates, institutions, schools, and churches affected the Palestinian Christians. Divisions increased dramatically, further fragmenting the already tenuous links between the numerous communities. New loyalties grew out of schisms within old churches. Every church – Greek Orthodox, Coptic, Syriac, Chaldean, Armenian – lost followers to the Pope. New "Uniate" congregations continued old ethnic ties but proclaimed loyalties to Rome.[170]

The fragmentation of indigenous Christians in Palestine allowed foreign powers to easily enter into the large pool of influences upon local Christians. Russian, French, and English institutions were among the earliest influences upon Palestine at the time. In the last eighteenth century, the Russian government gained approval to protect the Orthodox. The Austrians, Italians, and British followed suite, all claiming specific sects as well as the entire Christian population as their concerns.[171] The establishment of foreign consulates and missions throughout the Levant had lasting effect on the region. It also set a precedent that would continue to mold the identity and relations of indigenous Christians for centuries.

The most influential foreign influence upon Palestinian Christians was the substantial growth of religious missions. These branches of Latin Catholic and, increasingly in number, Protestant denominations made contacts with local populations. They proved to have substantial and pervasive effects on Eastern Christians, especially non-Orthodox. Over the course of the coming centuries, the various Western churches invested in networks of churches, monasteries, schools, charitable groups, and socially attuned programs.[172] Universities and printing presses were also established in the region. Generally speaking, the French proclaimed guardianship over Latin

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[170] Ibid. pg. 123.
[171] Hourani, A. H. *Minorities in the Arab World*. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947. pg. 24.
[172] Pacini, Andrea. ed. *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. pg. 36.

Catholic assets and followers in the Holy Land. The European nation supported the Pope when the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem was established in 1847.[173] Meanwhile, Russia had a longstanding relationship with Orthodox believers.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the presence of Protestant missions increased dramatically in Palestine. Their mission work and proselytizing mainly targeted the Orthodox; they were the most accessible communities.[174] Anglican, Lutheran, and Episcopal activity increased in Palestine. An Anglican bishopric was established in Jerusalem in 1841, while the church's parishes grew in Nazareth in the following two decades.[175] The United States Protestant communities became involved in the region, as well. In many cases, the church activities paved the way for the sponsoring nations to intervene in regional politics.[176] This further complicated societal and political issues in Palestine. With each new party involved in Palestinian Christianity, the list of potential identities and loyalties grew.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, foreign participation in the Ottoman Empire was greatly influencing internal policies. European governments lobbied for more egalitarian, democratic principles to be implemented; they sought equitable treatment of Christians under the Islamic rule. In 1839, the Ottoman sultan handed down a Hatti-i Sheriff that paved the way for citizen equality and fair treatment, including taxation. Then in 1856, a watershed moment in the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the Hatt-i Humayun was proclaimed; it established equal treatment regardless of ethno-religious background.[177] While the official decree was a monumental shift in imperial ideology, the implementation and social acceptance differed greatly.

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[173] Ibid. pg. 37.
[174] Attie, Caroline Camille. *The Greek Orthodox Community in Lebanon: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives.* The University of Texas at Austin, 1988. pg. 63.
[175] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 133.
[176] Ye'or, Bat. *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996. pg. 157.
[177] Khater, Akram Fouad. *Sources in the History of the Modern Middle East*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2004. pg. 14.

International consulates and religious missions were engaged observers of Christian lifestyle and treatment in Palestine. Their conclusions offer valuable insights into the state of Christianity in Palestine. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, they were able to construct comprehensive views of social interaction within heterogeneous Palestine. Hugh Rose, the consul general for Great Britain, observed in 1841 that local Muslims were agitating for *shari'a* law and the continuation of *dhimmi* treatment over their Christian neighbors. Their actions were in "diametrical opposition to the doctrine of equality of all before the law which is the essence of the Hatti Sheriff."[178]

This regional disapproval and disregard of *Tanzimat* reforms was systemic throughout Palestine and represented the fragile character of the heterogeneous Holy Land. Throughout many centuries of many violent changes of power, one consistent characteristic of politics in Palestine was the compartmentalized, ethno-religious pockets. Another constant was tribal, Arab dominance in the rural stretches to the south and east. These were two factors that did not readily welcome centralized, top-down proclamations of egalitarianism.

While the Ottoman Empire was seeking to reform itself, there were fresh bouts of violence in Palestine. Over a period of four years, starting in 1856, there were episodic massacres of Christians that occurred in Syria, Lebanon, and in the city of Nablus[179]. All told, it is estimated that twenty thousand Christians in the Levant were murdered. These attacks were understood to be attempts to intimidate and neutralize the Christian communities.[180] They were also part of a greater effort to maintain a hierarchy that was challenged by myriad sources. *Dhimmi* systems and Muslim hegemony were being challenged and the majority was unwilling to quietly let change come. In fact, the popular dissent over attempts to heighten the status of *dhimmis* was so threatening that

[178] Ye'or, Bat. *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996. pg. 173.
[179] Ye'or, Bat. *The Dhimmi*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980. pg. 93.
[180] Ibid. pg. 104.

Ottoman officials in Palestine deliberately disregarded most of the reforms. They feared assassination or other forms of retribution by the masses.[181]

Foreign powers, church missions, and Ottoman decrees all played part in altering the social structure in Palestine. It is important to recognize, meanwhile, that the indigenous Christian population was also actively participating. Eastern Christians of varying doctrines eagerly participated in developing nationalist notions in the region. After spending fourteen hundred years on the periphery of Muslim society, many Christian intellectuals were eager to foster a new, inclusive identity through which equal treatment and full citizenship could be attained. Nationalism became significant issues in the region by the early nineteenth century. The notion, adopted from European origin, allowed for broader notions of identity, memory, and community. It was also a largely secular principle that allowed religious inclusion. This was the most attractive characteristic of the budding political concept.

The different Christian communities reacted to the changing of official policies in different ways. Non-Orthodox believers suffered from heightened divisions in their communities as loyalties to official policy, local community, and Uniate influences separated them.[182] Meanwhile, many of the European missions took steps to consolidate their power. However, the Orthodox patriarch in Jerusalem compelled the Ottoman sultan to forbid proselytism; this helped slow the Christian divisions. A majority of Christians threw its support behind Arab nationalism. There were varying reasons for this, one being the desire to create a society that was more accommodating and inclusive.

Many Palestinian Christians showed great support for the Arab nationalist model because it offered a structure that did not discriminate over the basis of religion. It was a primarily linguistic

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[181] Ibid. pg. 99.
[182] Ye'or, Bat. *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1996. pg. 190.

model that allowed Christians to identify with Muslims within a cohesive entity. The works of Sati al-Husri, Michel Aflaq, and many others emboldened Christians to work towards linguistic national model. They saw it as an opportunity to break out of the religious labels and stigmas that had oftentimes disadvantaged them.

Defining communities by the Arabic language that they spoke was the most effective way for minorities, like Christians, to incorporate their selves into a larger system. Many Palestinian Christians were particularly interested in such a prospect; centuries of *dhimmi* treatment, religious stigmas, and the compartmentalized *millet* system had left them marginalized, second-class citizens. The increased, capitulary influence of European, Christian powers had further instigated resentment among the once dominant Muslim majority. Church missions and state consulates were highly effective institutions that were altering the balance of power and stability of the Muslim system. The people staffing these institutions extensively recorded observations of the Palestinian Christian population, as well as how they were being treated by the Muslim majority.

These foreign observers witnessed a culture of fear and introversion that was limiting the opportunities of the Palestinian Christian communities. In fact, there are many reports from the latter half of the nineteenth century that indicate a heightened resentment towards Palestinian Christians. The hierarchy of Dhimmitude, as well as the intentions of the Muslim majority, had left indigenous Christians vulnerable to manipulation, intimidation, and even violence. They became targets whenever Muslim frustrations over declining hegemony were manifested. British Consuls, in particular, offer strong evidence of the *dhimmi* treatment of Christians and Jews. James Finn wrote frequent briefings to the Earl of Malmesbury, for example. In them, he made constant mention of Christians being harassed in the streets, often "accompanied by acts of violence."[183] He also noted that Christians would rarely report these events to Ottoman officials; there was no

[183] Ibid. pg. 397.

precedent indicating that their evidence would be followed up on. Furthermore, there was reason to believe that they could be targeted further if they sought assistance. He closed one letter by writing, "This in Jerusalem, where Christian Consuls have flags flying, including the Russian: but can this state of things be expected to last long?"[184] He, too, recognized that the hierarchy and relations in Palestine were deeply entrenched. Foreign powers and Liberal proclamations would have little effect on the situation.

In other letters, Consul Finn recounted the plundering of Christian houses in Nablus, and the complete ransacking of two Christian villages by neighboring Muslim communities. When Tahir, a military Pasha, arrived in the city, Finn observed:

> [He demanded] a house to serve for a barrack, instead of encamping in tents at this beautiful season, the house of the Christian priest (Greek) was taken in his absence and his stores of grain and oil for household use during the winter were taken, not to be consumed by the soldiers but were mixed into one heap, wheat, barley, lentils, and oil, by the Moslems of the city, and thrown into the street.[185]

This and other events confirmed that Palestinian Christians were experiencing the worst treatment in a long time. Furthermore, discrimination in employment left Christians out of governmental, military, and even basic police positions.[186]

In some areas, the *jizya* was revived. Even long forgotten *dhimmi* policies, like the prohibition of bell ringing, were revived by fanatical Muslims who were enraged at the elevated status and greater opportunities being accessed by their Christian neighbors. Through all of this, the local government did nothing. Consuls and missionaries, themselves, were also targeted by local Muslims. In some cases, children would throw rocks at them while screaming, "Nazarani" if they

[184] Ibid. pg. 398.
[185] Ibid. pg. 399.
[186] Ibid. pg. 416.

got too close to local mosques.[187] It was clear that a critical mass of Muslims in Palestine sought to keep Christians in their place, and was willing to go to violent measures to do so.

The reemergence of open intimidation, violence, and generally denigrating treatment to Palestinian Christians had tremendous effects upon their population. After periods of relative peace and opportunity, the return of hierarchical marginalization damaged the psyche the Palestinian Christian. Centuries of *dhimmi* treatment and stigmas based on religious identity had taken their toll.

One of the most pervasive, influential effects of this treatment is a phenomena that independent scholar Bat Ye'or has titled "Dhimmi Syndrome." She describes:

> Twelve centuries of humiliation impressed upon the individual and collective psychologies of the oppressed groups a common form of alienation – the dhimmi syndrome. On the individual level it was characterized by a profound dehumanization. The individual, resigned to a passive existence, developed a feeling of helplessness and vulnerability, the consequence of a condition of permanent insecurity, servility, and ignorance. Humiliated and discriminated against, he projected onto his group a scornful, accusatory, self-destructive hatred whose intensity varied in accordance with the extent of his desire to assimilate into the majority. […] The basic characteristics of the dhimmi syndrome result from the psychological process of human debasement.[188]

Examples of Dhimmi Syndrome can be found, to varying degrees, within the modern historical narrative of Palestinian Christianity. One of the most explicit forms was supported by an Orthodox Palestinian Christian named Khalil Askander Qubrusi. He supported the theory that all major aspects of culture in the region were tied to Islam. Even Arabic and the linguistic ties that some

[187] Ye'or, Bat. *The Dhimmi*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980. pg. 64.
[188] Ibid. pg. 143.

hoped would spawn secular nationalism were linked to Muhammad and the spread of Islam, according to this position.[189]

Qubrusi expanded upon positions put forward by his predecessors, like Syrian born Constantine Zurayq. He warned that secular nationalisms, like Arabism, would inhibit communal bonds found in "true religion" and the Islamic bond of the region. Qubrusi, as a writer in Palestine, took the theory further and proposed that all indigenous Christians should Islamize, in order to create clear delineations between "Muslim Arabs and Christian foreigners."[190] While it is clear from his writings that he resented foreign presence in Palestine, his willingness to dismiss the local Christian identity as genuinely Palestinian is stunning.

Qubrusi's and other local Christians' opinions that the Christian faith is foreign are complemented by the belief that Islam is the only acceptable religion and identity. Compromise of Christian identity, volunteered by Palestinian Christians, is a stunning development. It was indicative of how low they perceived themselves, their faith, and their position within the greater Islamic community. The identity crisis was spawned by an acceptance of the belief Christians were lesser. The *dhimmi* system of dehumanizing treatment was quieting the minorities. For many, centuries of communal abasement effected Palestinian Christians in a way that numbed and neutralized their clout. Some sought a way out by altering their identity, and assimilating into the majority.

Another major trend within the Palestinian Christian psyche was the maintenance of fervent Anti-Semitism and Jew hatred. The myth of deicide was perpetuated with particular vigor in the region of Palestine. Particularly during the Muslim reigns, Palestinian disconnect from Rome and Constantinople allowed for early precepts to coagulate and gain legitimacy among local populations. The predominance of Monophysite believers also contributed to disconnect from

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[189] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 158.
[190] Ibid. pg. 158.

Orthodox doctrine, which would slowly quiet the echoes of deicide throughout the centuries. The theological basis of Jew hatred can not be understated, meanwhile. It was an early, highly inflammatory concept that placed blame on Jews for the death of Jesus Christ. The psychological and emotive effects from the death of the Messiah were particularly influential within the Holy Land.

The long tradition of theologically based resentment over the crucifixion of Jesus had been maintained in the Holy Land for centuries. As mentioned in earlier chapters, discrimination against Jews in the region was commonplace early in the rise of Christianity.[191] Some of the policies that were commonplace within Muslim *dhimmi* treatment resembled earlier Byzantine Christian policies that dehumanized and abused Jews. The Christian leader of Jerusalem, Sophronius, suggested to Muslim invaders that they continue the denigration and persecution of Jews.[192] Jew hatred and the perpetuation of the deicide myth continued to ferment within the Holy Land for many reasons. These include, but are not limited to, the relative isolation of the myriad Christian communities from the rest of Christendom.

Resentment of Jews continued throughout the centuries; it was consistent with the heightened consciousness and tensions surrounding ethno-religious identity. With the nineteenth century and the development of modern Zionism, Palestinian Christian hostility towards Jews reignited. Christian anti-Zionism was particularly rabid and was based in theological rhetoric. The thought of Jewish immigrants flowing into Palestine and establishing themselves independently

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[191] The concept of deicide is founded in a belief that the Jews were responsible for killing Jesus. It states that Jews had the motive to kill him; ideas in his preaching clearly challenged the premises held by Hellenized Jews in the high priesthood. As such, resentment and anger is projected upon the Jewish community. However, the concept of deicide is completely unfounded and neglects basic truths. For example, the Romans decreed his execution, and crucifixion is a Roman execution tactic, not a Jewish one (which is stoning). Meanwhile, the Romans had much more of a reason to eliminate Jesus; his popularity as a local leader threatened their influence.

[192] Ye'or, Bat. *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1996. pg. 45.

from, and more successfully than, the indigenous population was too much.[193] Furthermore, Christian efforts to establish greater autonomy, opportunities, and equality had been stifled throughout history by majority populations. Palestinian Christians were angered that Zionists were being aided and protected by foreign powers, while indigenous populations were quietly marginalized.

Palestinian Christian resentment of Zionist immigrants was also spurned by anger over foreign involvement in the region. Minority Christians shared the frustrations that majority Muslims were also feeling towards external influences. Perception of a common enemy complemented a shared Anti-Semitism, even if the latter was based in different concepts. The former, meanwhile, helped Palestinian Christians further gravitate towards the Muslim majority. They used the common bond as another way to relate, or perhaps assimilate, into the *umma*.[194]

Actions accompanied the hope that the Muslim majority would be more inclusive for minority Christians. As mentioned above, Christians throughout the region became major supporters of Arabism and nationalist efforts. Christians were eager to embrace the ethnic label of Palestinian; it was thought to offer a more accommodating identity. Many Palestinian Christians became influential players within nationalism movements, working eagerly with Muslims in order to gain recognition as citizens within the community.

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In 1917, the Balfour Declaration was sent to representatives of the World Zionist Organization. With it, the British government diplomatically announced its support for Zionist motives in the Holy Land. Tensions continued to mount in what was now the British Mandate of Palestine; Ottoman control was lost after World War I and the Sykes-Picot Treaty. As Jews continued to immigrate and establish themselves throughout the land, Palestinian Christians saw

[193] Ibid. pg. 208.
[194] Ibid. pg. 208.

themselves as dispossessed communities who were disenfranchised by external forces yet again. Their new neighbors and the world governments saw them as local Arabs who were squatting on Jewish homeland. Their Muslim brothers, meanwhile, abstained from making an issue of their religion; Palestinian Christians were effective members of the nationalist efforts.

Throughout the Palestinian nationalist efforts, Christians were active participants. They were some of the first to develop the *Nahda* culture revival, emphasizing Arab culture and ties that bound indigenous populations.[195] They were involved in moves to establish the Palestine Arab Congress during the early twentieth century. Their move was a reaction to the British mandate and failure of Greater Syria national efforts.[196] Orthodox believers in Palestine became particularly active, filling positions in print media and even prominent political positions. The most influential Arabic newspaper was edited by Orthodox Palestinians. The Orthodox Ya'qub Farraj, meanwhile, was vice-president of one of the two leading Palestinian political parties.[197] Some Palestinian Christians also worked as mediators throughout the struggles over British mandates, Zionism, nationalism, and ethno-religious relations.

The Palestinian movement became increasingly based in Islamic beliefs as the twentieth century progressed. Muslim leaders like Grand Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husaini increasingly became involved, and with their activity, religious-based rhetoric increased.[198] In order for Christians to maintain their involvement and credited participation within the Palestinian community, they had to submit to Islamized trends. Specifically after the war in 1967 and the utter failure of secular Arabism movements, religion increased as an identifier. Many Palestinian Christians continued to participate in the Palestinian Liberation Organization and other nationalist groups; some rose to

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[195] Pacini, Andrea. ed. *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. pg. 11.
[196] Hopwood, Derek. *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine 1843-1914.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969. pg. 200.
[197] Ibid. pg. 201.
[198] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 245.

highly influential posts. However, Muslim majority and hegemony was firmly entrenched. Palestinian Christians were to be supporting actors in any nationalist effort.

Meanwhile, Christian Anti-Semitism continued to escalate within the Palestinian community. When Winston Churchill visited Palestinian Christian leaders in 1923, they presented him with a copy of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.[199] The forged document was a manifestation of shocking and vicious Anti-Semitism in Czarist Russia; it established the ridiculous premise that Jewish leaders were bent on a conspiracy of world domination.

With the establishment of the state of Israel, along with the tremendous refugee and war problems plaguing their communities, Palestinian Christians had tangible reasons to resent Jews and Israelis. The refugee crisis affected all Palestinians, including tens of thousands of Christians. As non-Jews, Christians were adversely affected by segregation and discrimination in Israel proper. In reaction to these and other issues, Palestinian Christians grew in hostility. When Rome formally condemned the notion of deicide in late 1965, Eastern Christians throughout the Middle East rabidly condemned the development. Benediktos, a Jerusalem based Jacobite patriarch, said that the document was "inconsistent with Holy Scriptures." Meanwhile, other church leaders throughout the region said Rome has betrayed Christianity; one added, "Freeing the Jews of the blood of Christ is the greatest of sins."[200]

Politically speaking, by 1967 the vast majority of Palestinian Christians were supporters of Palestinian national efforts, anti-Israel, and highly suspicious of foreign activity within the region. From suspicion of Greek Orthodox clergy to the United States and Soviet involvement in strategic balance, Christians threw in their hats with their Muslim neighbors. Their best option was to ally with the community that was similarly disenfranchised. They were also the most similar when applying the ethnic model that was most prevalent at the time. However, it was an uneasy

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[199] Ye'or, Bat. *Islam and Dhimmitude.* Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002. pg. 281.
[200] Betts, Robert Brenton. *Christians in the Arab East.* Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975. pg. 158.

partnership. External threats to the Palestinian community did not nullify the hierarchy, resentment, and skepticism between the different religious communities.

Put simply, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was catastrophic to the Palestinian Christian communities. They were caught in a political and strategic situation where they had no substantial numbers and no significant allies. As Christians, they were suspected by Palestinian Muslims. As Palestinians, they were dismissed by the Israelis. Joseph Maïla wrote:

> The fact of being Arabs is what makes them different in the eyes of the rest of the world, particularly the West, with whom they share the same faith. Their Christianity is what makes them different in the Arab world, with whom they share culture and destiny. Middle Eastern Christians are thus Arabs by culture, Christians by faith, and citizens of separate States by political definition.[201]

It is important to recognize that while Palestinian Christians suffered severely from the regional conflict, some were unique opportunities for some. Arab Christians living in Israel were granted more rights than their Muslim counterparts as years progressed. Christian clergy had the ability to travel to and from bordering Arab states with much greater ease than others.[202] However, this was not a privilege that Israel extended to any other Christians.

Throughout the Mandate period, establishment of the state of Israel, and vehement struggle for Palestinian nationalism, Christians in the Holy Land suffered tremendous difficulties. These have perpetuated emigration, decreased their mobility, limited economic opportunities, stunted political motivations, and hindered social contact. Most importantly, revolutions in identity have left Christians marginalized. They have been experiencing crises over their position within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well. It is clear that the label of Palestinian has been accepted by nearly all Christians. However, struggles over inclusion within this national community continue to this day.

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[201] Pacini, Andrea. ed. *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. pg. 28.
[202] Betts, Robert Brenton. *Christians in the Arab East*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975. pg. 173.

Chapter Nine:

Contemporary Identities and Conditions of the Palestinian Christians

Contemporary Palestinian Christians deal with a juggernaut of challenges. The factors influencing their daily lives are exorbitantly complex and pervasive. They exist, now, as part of a web of innumerable loyalties, powers, memories, and identities. Nationality, religion, language, and ethnicity are just a few of the characteristics that influence identity in Palestine, today. Identity inevitably influences how people interact, support, or conflict with others. It is important, therefore, that any person interested in the region understands that complexities seemingly eclipse reason in many instances.

Christians living the region of Palestine – today, the State of Israel and the Palestinian territories – often succumb to the overwhelming nature of their environment. The way they perceive their own identity can even become muddled. Defining one's own identity, as well as that of one's community, becomes an arduous process when there are myriad identities (and implications) to take into account. Creating a hierarchy of labels often becomes beneficial. For reasons that were described earlier, Palestinian Christians today are more apt to gravitate towards a broad, inclusive Palestinian identity than one based on religion. This should not be mistaken as a dismissal of their faith communities. Rather, Palestinian Christians boast deep pride, loyalty, and awareness of their religious roots. Throughout the Holy Land, they pride themselves as being the

"living stones" of the Church, the Christians who are closest geographically and culturally to their Messiah.[203]

Despite this intimate connection to the Christian faith and corresponding identities, those in the Holy Land are anxious to consider themselves to be part of a larger, inclusive community. More importantly, it is clear that they struggle be accepted by others into such a community, real or otherwise. Their numbers quiet their voice, stunt their ability to actively participate, and inhibit their inclusion within societies that are heavily based on religion. This is true of Palestinian Christians living in the state of Israel as well as those residing in the West Bank.

In Israel

The Christian communities in the Galilee remain the largest within the State of Israel. Today the Christians living there have Israeli citizenship and live under the laws of the Jewish nation. At the turn of the twenty-first century, most Christians living in Nazareth accepted their residence within Israel without significant reservations. There is an acceptance of the political status quo, no doubt stemming from an ability to pursue stable, subsistent, even prosperous lives. The complex, multi-faceted relationship of Muslims and Christians in Nazareth is significant, meanwhile. The two faith communities share minority status within Israel, as well as the memory of regional atrocities and traumas stemming from 1948. These practical and identity-based realities have allowed a level of cooperation and coexistence that is unique. However, it should be remembered that it is qualified.

In the case of Christians Palestinians living in Nazareth, as well as most other indigenous Muslims and Christians living in Israel, ethnic commonalities have offered a bridge. Similarities in political, economic, and social conditions have created parallel experiences, in many cases. They

[203] Naoum, Hosam, & Na'el abu Rahmoun. Personal Interview. 7 June 2007.

live with similar experiences, interacting with the majority population and Israeli governmental, judicial, economic, and even transportation systems. Their common minority status can, and has, created a permeable level of solidarity against a commonly perceived foreign body. But this is not to say that conflicts do not exist between Palestinians living in Israel.

The term "Arab Israeli" has been used to describe most indigenous Muslims and Christians in the Jewish state. But while many new practical variables link their experiences, religious identity is still very important. Nazarene Christians, for example, emphasize that they are Palestinian Christians who are living in the State of Israel.[204] Sometimes, their recognition of Israel is only limited to referencing their government issued identity card. Many are not eager to highlight any connection to the Jewish state. The struggle to define and maintain a collectively cohesive identity is an important one; it permeates their daily lives. It is also a very difficult one.

Christians in Israel live with the confusion of multiple labels that denote multiple identities, histories, and alliances. Their official citizenship within the State of Israel is perhaps the most confusing. Nazarenes, like all Christians in Israel proper, are granted Israeli citizenship and live by the government's laws. Christians live with the Israeli label, despite their personal political or national opinions. But the citizenship is deceiving; the nation-state title is certainly not seen as their personal identities. In fact, there is tremendous frustration within the greater Palestinian community living in Israel. This stems from tangible examples of discrimination and minority status.

The discrimination that is directed towards Palestinians, including Christians, can manifest itself in many different ways. One of the more pervasive examples is connected to military service. Every Israeli Jew, save those who receive exemptions due to orthodox religious study, is required to serve in the Israeli military. After active duty service, they continue their service by remaining in the reserve forces. However, non-Jewish Israelis live under different laws pertaining to military

[204] Karam, Habib. Personal Interview. 11 June 2007.

service. While some populations volunteer to serve, most Palestinian Christians balk at military service.[205] This decision has implications on their economic success and career opportunities, however.

Nazarene Christians today are affected by an increasingly common tactic used by Israeli employers. Jewish bosses require that job applicants have served in the military. This is common even for jobs that have no relevant connection to IDF service. Palestinians, across the board, perceive this to be a discriminatory action targeting "Arabs," because they simply "don't serve in the army."[206] Meanwhile, religious and ethnic differences are consistently referenced as barriers for getting into Israeli universities. While examples of discrimination have decreased dramatically over the years, preference for Jewish students is still systemic. This is a major reason why Palestinians in positions to receive college educations opt to learn in the United States or other foreign countries.

Frustrations with the Israeli label, as well as the government linked to it, also spring from demographic patterns. Early in the development of the new state, the Israeli government made an effort to separate ethno-religious communities and delineate where they would live. The case of Upper and Lower Nazareth is an excellent example. The community built on the higher elevation was established in the years immediately following Israel's War for Independence. It is a well planned community with wide streets, urban planning, and aesthetic delights. It was intended to be a Jewish settlement.[207] Across a canyon and lower in elevation lies historic Nazareth, where the remaining Palestinians, Muslim and Christian, live today. The old, richly cultured city has tight, winding roads cutting through the now congested houses and shops. It has the unique, long-lived

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[205] The Druze community living within Israel is an excellent example for the former. Druze soldiers voluntarily fought side by side with Jewish forces in 1948. In 1956, they were officially conscripted into the Israel Defense Force. This occurred because the collective community lobbied for compulsory Druze service within the IDF. Druze service to Israel has been beneficial to the local population. The community enjoys unique religious status that grants them judicial autonomy. Furthermore, they enjoy recognition on their identification cards. In 1961, Druze was added as a nationality classification; they were formerly lumped under the "Arab" label.

[206] Karam, Habib. Personal Interview. 11 June 2007.

[207] Sennott, Charles M. *The Body and The Blood*. New York: Public Affairs, 2001. pg. 82.

nature of old cities in the region. However, the city's characteristic population density is a product of land confiscation.[208] Much of the farm land and hillside areas around Nazareth have been confiscated by Israeli parties throughout the past six decades. Much of this land was previously held by Palestinian Christians. It became necessary for the population to compress itself into the smaller area.

Although the two towns share the one name of Nazareth, they are worlds apart. Close in proximity but distant in connections, the two realms are homes to entirely different populations and economic experiences. Speaking to Palestinian Christians living in Nazareth today, one finds an air of pride when they boast that their community is self-sufficient. There is satisfaction in knowing that they don't have to depend on Upper Nazareth or other communities for shopping, schools, or hospitals.[209] However, this confidence is deceiving. A self-proclaimed reality, again volunteered by the Christian community, is that the job market in the Palestinian community is not large and diversified enough. Many Christians depend on Israeli jobs; this necessity makes them further susceptible to the discrimination mentioned earlier.

This discrimination makes it difficult for qualified Palestinian Christians to attain appropriate jobs. The community recognizes that many of their educated neighbors are in this predicament. There is a high concentration of college graduates without jobs in Christian communities. This is a product of Israeli job discrimination against the "Arab sector" as well as a lack of economic development allotted to Palestinian communities.[210] There has also been a major shift of Christian employment to agrarian positions; a large number of Christians find it necessary to travel hours away from their homes, daily, in the hope for employment. There is a general lack of employment opportunities, industrialized or otherwise, in most Israeli Palestinian communities.

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[208] Jabaly, Abla. Personal Interview. 11 June 2007.
[209] Karam, Habib. Personal Interview. 11 June 2007.
[210] Jabaly, Abla, Personal Interview. 11 June 2007.

Inconsistencies can be found in municipal appropriations, as well. Christian Nazarenes are well aware of such political realities. One Christian noted that the "Arab town" gets a quarter of the budget appropriations for road maintenance that the "Jewish town" receives annually. "Confirmed as accurate" figures are hard to draw out of the local community. This is, perhaps, a telling indication of political disconnect or poor communication within the community. Nevertheless, they passionately spout figures, trends, and frustration to whomever will listen; it is a profound indication of general frustration and discontent.

What is overwhelmingly apparent is a systemic feeling of minority status and inequity. It is recognized as a problem for all Palestinians living in Israel, but it is felt as a Christian community struggle. When asked what could improve the quality of life for the Christian population living in Israel, one Nazarene emphasized, "Equality in education. Equality in work. Equality in government aid, you know, to businesses and their opportunity for them to work." He made it clear that the community was not seeking pure aid. Rather, he submitted a request that they be allowed "the same opportunity that [is allowed] to the Jewish person."[211]

The issues that Christian Palestinians find with Israel do not mute any dilemmas that exist with the Muslim populations there. Rather, it simply adds to the cacophony of community interactions. Political issues and economic interactions within the Israeli state add onto preexisting ethno-religious conflicts. Today, for example, religious fanaticism is on the rise amongst Palestinian Muslims living in Israel. On the daily scale, it manifests itself in a heightened consciousness of religious identity. Christians living in Nazareth note that a certain portion of the Muslim community makes an effort to highlight "their Islamic rights […] and try to show [that] the Christians are nothing."[212] Nazarene Christians note that Friday prayers are always transmitted through amplification systems attached to mosques. Messages condemning the Christian

[211] Karam, Habib. Personal Interview. 11 June 2007.
[212] Kupty, Rhadia. Personal Interview. 11 June 2007.

population frequently echo through the Nazarene hills, as Muslims are told that the Palestinian Christians are not truly "of the Book."

The more radical Muslim population is of growing concern for Palestinian Christians. However, Nazarenes are quick to note that there are still many Palestinian Muslims that are open minded and eager to continue living peacefully with their neighbors. These are Muslims that continually participate in the daily cycle of Nazareth. They include store owners and bakers who open their doors to Christians and Muslims, alike. They go to school with the Christians and are eager to participate within a stable system, even if one does not exist.[213] The reality of Christian-Muslim relations is further example of the innumerable influences upon contemporary communities in the Holy Land.

Education

As mentioned quickly above, education is a factor that greatly affects the Palestinian Christian community in the region. It is also an excellent indicator of status, opportunity, and relations. Christian communities have depended on private schools for well over a century. They have benefited from charitable and missionary work accomplished by foreign states and church bodies. Today Christians in Israel continue to depend on local, parochial schools. There are constant complaints about the Israeli public curriculum and its insufficiencies for Palestinians. The most consistent issue is over the apparent preference of Jewish students over Christians or Muslims within the Israeli university system. Many Palestinian Christians, throughout Israel and the West Bank, point to different grade demands for Christians to get into college. They complain that Jews with lower grades are consistently admitted before more qualified minorities. For this reason, most Christians seek university educations in the United States and other foreign countries, where there

[213] Ibid.

are more equitable admission standards.[214] This separation from the Israeli system, however, can make it difficult for them to seek jobs and re-implement themselves upon return. Some Christians choose to send their children to Israeli public schools, because it helps them enter the Hebrew university system and Israeli job market more easily. One recent survey found that a third of Christian students in Israel go to public schools. This compares to barely nine percent in the West Bank.[215]

Primary and secondary education continues to lie in the hands of private, religious schools. They are heavily based in missionary institutions and their primary identifiers are their respective denominations. Although they are not particularly exclusive, they are known as sectarian schools. For instance, in Nazareth alone, there are Latin Catholic, Anglican, Greek Orthodox, and Baptist schools, among others.[216] These schools welcome Muslim students and heterogeneous classrooms have been commonplace for decades. Some schools, like the Baptist school in Nazareth, only admit Christians, but they are the minority. The decision to admit Muslim students has led to a large influx, today. In many schools throughout the region, Muslims comprise a majority within the classroom. However, little to no curriculum changes have been made on their behalf. Curriculum includes the sciences, math, and language studies that include Arabic, English, often French or other European languages, and sometimes Hebrew. History and religious study is particularly focused on the Christian mind and accent religious history and specific denominations' memory and identity. Oftentimes, Muslim students are released from the classroom during religious education classes; no alternate lesson is provided to them.[217]

Private schools are by far the most popular education option for Palestinian Christians and Muslims, today. Public schools have been overstretched and under-resourced for year. Now, the

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[214] Karam, Habib. Personal Interview. 11 June 2007.
[215] *The Sabeel Survey*. Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, 2006. pg. 18.
[216] Kupty, Rhadia. Personal Interview. 11 June 2007.
[217] Karam, Habib. Personal Interview. 11 June 2007.

tremendous demands and understaffing issues prevalent in public school systems are affecting the private schools. However, historically, even though the private religious schools were the more popular option, their graduates had issues transitioning into the public system. Issues of quotas and inequality of Israeli admission standards have been discussed earlier, but these issues were not exclusive to the Hebrew system. Through 1967, the West Bank was under Jordanian control; its education system was maintained by the Hashemite's Ministry of Education. Their standardized exam of education completion, the Tawjihi, has been used to indicate individual ability.[218] The exam is an indication of secondary education capabilities and is based on the French "Baccalaureat" system. It also is the only way to become eligible for higher education within the Arab sector. The Tawjihi has been adopted by the Palestinian Authority and it is continued in the West Bank to this day. Private schooled individuals had difficulty accessing the exam; learning the exam format and material was difficult. Meanwhile, there were quotas within the Arab sector which limited the admittance of non-Tawjihi graduates. Again, particularities of the Christian education system left their students disadvantaged within the local systems.

The differences between public school curriculums and private religious regiments are negligible. The main difference is the latter's inclusion of religious education classes and, sometimes, additional history lessons pertaining to their ethno-religious groups. Besides this, language development differs slightly. Public schools start second language studies later than the private missionary schools, for example.[219] However, there is a major stigma associated with public schools. Most public schools are referred to by the local population as "government-run schools." Their association with Israel and its military (in the state for the former, in the West Bank for the latter), has created a pervasive aversion throughout the entire Palestinian population.[220]

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[218] Khoury, Sameea. Personal Interview. 6 June 2007.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Haramy, Omar. Personal Interview. 6 June 2007.

The Palestinian Authority's public education system is largely a continuation of the Jordanian system that preceded it. As mentioned above, the Tawjihi is used as the culminating exam. However, there have been some changes made for the benefit of the Christian population. For instance, some curricula and specialized tests focusing on Muslim beliefs have been dropped. Nevertheless, there is a severe shortage of Christian teachers, both in the public and the private schools. Most teachers in the private schools continue to be missionaries, for example.

Economic Conditions

Economic concerns for Palestinians living in Jerusalem and the West Bank, meanwhile, are far more complex and threatening than those in Israel proper. The largest reason for this is the systemic economic chaos and occupation present in the West Bank. This reality affects all Palestinians, Muslim and Christian alike. Palestinian Christians, however, enjoy a higher rate of employment than their Muslim neighbors. A recent survey found Christian employment was as high as eighty-eight percent in the West Bank, while overall Palestinian employment had yet to reach sixty percent.[221] This is an encouraging sign, but it may also be a deceiving one. The definition of employment was unclear, and made no mention of total income. In reality, underemployment is a major issue plaguing the economically depressed communities. Sixteen percent of Christians employed in the West Bank were actively seeking second jobs, according to a 2006 survey; the income of their first job was not sufficient.[222] This is further indication of the economic disrepair that exists in the West Bank.

Rates of unemployment are quite high, as well. This term designates those who do not have jobs, but are actively looking for them. Christian unemployment is consistently lower than that of the general Palestinian population, both in Israel and the West Bank. However, both figures are

[221] *The Sabeel Survey*. Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, 2006. pg. 21.
[222] Ibid. pg. 25.

very high. In fact, according to estimates coming from Bethlehem's mayor, unemployment there is fifty percent, and many are struggling to provide meals for their families.[223] When the al-Aqsa Intifada began in September 2000, violence caused a catastrophic drop in tourism to Bethlehem and the surrounding towns. With the construction of Israel's Security Fence and the establishment of permanent checkpoints going into and out of the area, transportation and tourism have ground to an almost complete stop.

Many of the Palestinian Christians, specifically, depended on tourism and the flow of pilgrims into Bethlehem for their well-being. Now, shops throughout the town are closed or struggling. Many artisans and craftsman are jobless. One of the local professional trades was olive wood carving, and there was a high demand for it. Now families in Beit Sahour, for example, struggle to get permits so that they may cross into Israel and travel abroad to sell their works; very few tourists are willing or able to reach Bethlehem.[224]

Economic situations in the West Bank have deteriorated so severely throughout recent years that local economies are completely stagnant. Christians in the Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, and Bethlehem are affected like all other Palestinians by the desperate circumstances. Hundreds of Palestinians – Christians and Muslims alike – try everyday to pass into Israel and gain day labor jobs. Many used to have steady employment in Israel, but lost their jobs when traveling through the checkpoints became too difficult or inconsistent. Now, Palestinians of all sorts line up at Bethlehem's checkpoint as early as two o'clock in the morning, everyday. Their aim is to navigate through the searches, fingerprinting, metal detectors, and random strip searches so that they may find a day job on the other side.[225]

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[223] Finkel, Michael. "Bethlehem 2007 A.D." *National Geographic*. December 2007: pg. 64,65.
[224] Rishmawi, George. Personal Interview. 9 June 2007.
[225] Finkel, Michael. "Bethlehem 2007 A.D." *National Geographic*. December 2007. pg. 80.

Palestinian Christians in the West Bank indefatigably blame Israel for their economic plight and living conditions. They name the military occupation, checkpoints, and Security Fence as the primary reasons for their destitute suffering. However, the situation isn't nearly so simple. Perpetuated violence on both sides, complemented with an inability (perhaps, unwillingness) to charter a road to peace has allowed for escalation. Meanwhile, a vast majority of contemporary Palestinian Christians don't recognize internal divisions or communal discretions that have led to the current economic and political situations.

Nearly all Palestinian Christians condemn Israel's most radical strategic measure to date: the Security Fence. They understand the barrier to be an exercise in illegal land grabbing and discrimination.[226] The district around Bethlehem is one of the more effected areas; most of the barrier there is a twenty five foot tall concrete wall. It encircles the towns and only one checkpoint allows access to Israel.[227] All Palestinian Christians have been adversely affected by the building of the wall. Very few note that Israel's official reason for building it was to halt suicide bombers from entering Israel. Instead, they tell visitors how the barrier is suffocating and psychologically traumatizing. One Armenian Orthodox woman noted how an elderly woman suffered a heart attack after the wall was built, surrounding her house on three sides.[228]

The Security Fence, military checkpoints, and military occupation of the West Bank are all part of the greater geo-political, ethno-religious chaos in the region. Palestinian citizens find themselves experiencing the consequences of armed conflict and the realities of a war zone. For Palestinian Christians, being a minority in the situation is an even greater struggle. They fail to find equity, parity, or opportunity within the population that is being targeted causes even greater trauma. They are double victims.

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[226] Rishmawi, George. Personal Interview. 10 June 2007.
[227] *Israel Security Fence.* Ministry of Defense. 2003. <http://www.securityfense.mod.gov.il>.
[228] Nasar, Laura George. Personal Interview. 8 June 2007.

Politics

Politically speaking, contemporary Palestinian Christians have unique perspectives. They share a common awareness of political developments and trends within Israel and the West Bank. However, they have strict aversions to overt Christian political activity. For instance, most scoff at the idea of a Christian political party. The overall consensus is that such a blatant manifestation of political power runs counter to their religious faith.

Amongst Palestinian Christians there is a general aversion to politics rooted in religion. There has been a very long history of such practices in the region of Palestine, and Christians living there have never done particularly well. Memory of blatant *dhimmi* treatment, experience with residual resentment of Christians, and anger towards marginalization due to religious identity all play into Christian opinions. There is, meanwhile, a distinctly psychological reaction to the trauma of being stigmatized as well as persecuted for being of a minority religious community. Inquiries into modern Palestinian Christians' political opinions often spark two reactions: bewilderment or spontaneous regurgitations of highly principled, seemingly rehearsed responses. In the case of the latter, when one Palestinian Christian was asked about her opinion of Israel, she spoke rapidly for nearly twenty five minutes without interruption.[229] Throughout her diatribe against the Jewish state, she spoke against the Exodus narrative then boasted about good relations between Christians and Muslims. However, later in her interview she mentioned the weakness of Christians in the region and the need for greater security from the majority.

The topic of religious political parties, meanwhile, receives the same answers, regardless of how the individual gets there. Many Palestinian Christians see the prospect of religious political activism, on their part, as another source of divisiveness. One Haifa refugee, now living in East Jerusalem, fears that exclusively Christian activism would further polarize the Palestinian

[229] Duaybis, Cedar. Personal Interview. 6 June 2007.

community. The thought of enflaming Muslim relations is of particular concern. She stated that a Christian political party, for example, would "only create a counter […] it will attract antagonism." She and others believe that "[there] safe guard is [their] weakness." She said, "We are so small in number, we are so weak, we are not a threat to anybody." [230] The irony of this reality is quite telling. It also defines the impossible situation that Palestinian Christians are caught in, today.

Many Palestinian Christians, when asked about politics, point north to Lebanon. They offer up the civil wars, Christian militancy, and bloody power feuds between myriad ethno-religious groups as examples of what Christians in Palestine fear. Palestinian Christians are not devoid of tensions and conflicts in their daily lives. But the sensational violence and tensions breeding in Lebanon is perceived to be a world away. What is remarkable, though, is that many Palestinian Christians see the Lebanese plight as a product of Lebanese Christians' own devices. Because they are as powerful as their Muslim neighbors, because they are politically active, and because they have guns, they are to blame. In this sense, there is a dangerous aspect of the Palestinian Christian psyche. Many believe that their communities' small numbers, marginality, and general impotence are beneficial for their survival. This could be a product of a deeply engrained fear, conscious and otherwise, of confrontation.

Despite the cautious and even negative opinions Palestinian Christians have about overt religious-based political activity, the community has a lot to say about current politics. In fact, their activism and dialogue within the current political system reflects their attempts to participate and assimilate into a secular, Palestinian model. Christians in the Beit Sahour, Beit Jala, Bethlehem region have strong opinions about politics within the Palestinian Authority, for example. They are eager to see a democratic model instituted in the West Bank, and are more than willing to target Israel and the United States for being hypocritical in this case. Specifically, Christians shared the

[230] Ibid.

Palestinian-wide frustration with Israel's and the United States' lack of recognition of Hamas after their victories in the January 2006 elections. Many equate such actions as indications that external forces are unwilling to let Palestinians govern themselves.[231] Many Palestinian Christians also voice anger at current United States foreign policy in the region; they find inconsistency between rhetoric of freedom building and democracy with stifling actions in the Palestinian Territories.

One of the most interesting trends in current politics, however, was the level of Christian support for the political arm of Hamas. A significant portion of the Palestinian Christian population voiced support for Hamas.[232] Most who supported Hamas qualified their position, saying, "It was a vote against, not a vote for."[233] That is, there was great dissatisfaction with Fatah, issues with party corruption, and the manner in which it related to Israel. Other Palestinian Christians were attracted to the social activism and effective nature of Hamas' community projects. In Bethlehem, Hamas spent the equivalent of approximately $50,000 to decorate Bethlehem for Christmas celebrations, according to a resident in Beit Sahour.[234]

Generally speaking, the Christian population shared a generally Palestinian desire for change and a government that would actively seek reform in a system that did not sufficiently provide for them. An Anglican priest in Jerusalem, serving throughout towns in the West Bank, shirked any real concern about the effect of a fundamental Islamist party in control. He nonchalantly agreed that a party like Hamas would "seek for spreading the Islam rule among Palestine," but seemed to accept it only because he had resigned to the inevitability of such a development.[235] When asked if such a development would be disadvantageous for Christians, he

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[231] Bannoura, Ghassan. Personal Interview. 9 June 2007.
[232] Khader, Bahjat & Saleem Dawani. Personal Interview. 7 June 2007.
[233] Naoum, Hosam & Na'el abu Rahmoun. Personal Interview. 7 June 2007.
[234] Bannoura, Ghassan. Personal Interview. 9 June 2007.
[235] Khader, Bahjat & Saleem Dawani. Personal Interview. 7 June 2007.

again noted that were would be changes in their lifestyle, but overall he did not voice concern. "Maybe they will treat us well. But they will let us pay, for being safe. You know?"

What he was referring to was the *jizya* tax.

This clergyman, and others in the contemporary Christian communities, find it sufficient that the current Palestinian Authority has Christians in "high positions." They recognize that they have opportunities allotted to them that Christians in other countries like Egypt do not. They see this as a sign of equality and fair recognition by the Palestinian Authority. They mention that their churches were offered to contribute in the drafting process of their constitution.[236] Others highlight Christian inclusion within modern Palestinian society and government by noting that Christmas and Easter are recognized by the PA as official holidays.[237] Some Christians, meanwhile, go so far as to say that there is a form of "reverse discrimination" occurring in Palestinian politics.[238] They believe that Christians are over represented in the Palestinian Legislative Council and that it is unfair within the political scheme.

Still others voice concerns over the fact that Islamic *Shari'a* law is used as a basis of the PA legislative and judicial system. While Christian communities still used their own ecclesiastical laws and regulations internally, it is not allowed to supersede *Shari'a* law within the greater Palestinian community.[239] Islamic primacy within *Shari'a* law can hinder Christian legitimacy and integrity without specifically targeting it. For example, according to *Shari'a*, any abandoned child that is found is to be raised as a Muslim; according to the Quran, Islam is the religion of birth and people stray into error when they follow Christianity or Judaism.[240] There have been cases when children have been found placed at the front steps of local churches; many times, they also have crosses

[236] Pacini, Andrea. ed. *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. pg. 279.
[237] Bannoura, Ghassan. Personal Interview. 9 June 2007.
[238] Abu Zuluf, Nidal. Personal Interview. 9 June 2007.
[239] Duaybis, Cedar. Personal Interview. 6 June 2007.
[240] Ibid.

around their necks. However, according to *Shari'a* and the current Palestinian draft constitution, that child is to be raised a Muslim, no matter what indications the anonymous parent may have given to prove otherwise. Christian organizations have lobbied to change this and have found some support amongst Muslims. But the issue would still need to go to public referendum to change.

In Israel, meanwhile, Christians have access to a more egalitarian judicial system. Civil codes in the Jewish state offer fairer treatment. Oftentimes, Palestinians with means to accessing Israeli courts seek their assistance in matters that would go the other way under the Palestinian Authority.

Examples of Daily Treatment

For centuries, the Palestinian Christian communities have been minorities who have adapted to power shifts and treatment by the greater majorities. Their ability to survive and maintain their distinct identities is strong. However, they have stunted perceptions of collective liberty, power, and potential. Conversations with Palestinian Christians today, for example, uncover bewildering contradictions in such topics. Perceptions of liberty, treatment, and rights are quite muddled. In one instance, a female Armenian Orthodox Christian from Bethlehem offers such paradoxical statements. Interviewed in the spring of 2007, she was asked if she was ever caused to feel fear or intimidation because of a silver crucifix necklace she proudly wore; it was made clear that the source of intimidation would be the Muslim majority population of the city. She proudly and forcefully refused any suggestion that she was to be intimidated on account of her religion. She also went on to say that personal contact with non-Christians was not influenced by her religious identity. However, a short while later, she stated quite bluntly that Christians were minorities in the

region, and were treated as such. When asked if the minority status inhibited her freedoms, she said, "in a way, yeah."[241] She then volunteered an enlightening example, saying:

> What comes to my mind is the way of wearing my clothes. I have to take care, because I can not just put on my clothes freely because I might hear comments. So this is just an example. You can not – this is one aspect you have to think about before, like, walking the streets. I have to be, uh decent. Because you are walking with, like, strangers. And you can not allow anybody to tell you one comment. So, this is very important for a girl to think about when living here when you are a minority.[242]

She continued:

> You know, I park my car here outside of the center. And from the office of the center – it's only like two minutes [walking], in the street. I many times hear comments, many comments. […] The mentality is really making you feel sick.

She also mentioned that she had few interactions with non-Christians, and was "happy without it."

This one Christian's testimony of daily contact with Muslims is very telling. It offers a glimpse into Muslim treatment of Christians, as well as the latter's psyche and perception of their position in society. Her single response echoed a recurring Christian voice of confusion and repressed frustration when dealing with majority populations. While she and others are very proud of their religious identity and memory, they also feel chastised and targeted because of their differences. They are not always targeted due to their religious beliefs or iconography; the example above was centered on cultural dress codes. Nevertheless, any differences can be chosen as fodder against them.

Meanwhile, there are more radical examples of *dhimmi* treatment and prejudice targeting Palestinian Christians. In late summer of 2005, London's *Daily Telegraph* printed an article that

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[241] Nasar, Laura George. Personal Interview. 8 June 2007.
[242] Ibid.

said local Christians gave Church leaders in Jerusalem a "dossier" which "includes ninety-three alleged incidents of abuse by an 'Islamic fundamentalist mafia' against Palestinian Christians, who accused the Palestinian Authority of doing nothing to stop the attacks."[243] The document also spoke of nearly one hundred fifty cases of "apparent land theft" targeting Christians in the West Bank. This is just one of nearly innumerable examples of religious tensions and issues plaguing Palestinian Christians. They have been increasingly talked about in recent years. Committees, independent reporters and researchers, policy institutes, and government officials now focus on the predicament.

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Christian participation in local politics has suffered greatly, meanwhile, and many Christian politicians have resigned in protest. Meanwhile, Muslim politicians have strongly altered politics in the area. Palestinian Security Forces have strong influence in the area and often work on the behalf of Fatah.[244] When the Annapolis Conference was hosted by President George W. Bush in the fall of 2007, there were riots throughout the Palestinian Territories. Many were protesting any active negotiations with the state of Israel. When PA Security Forces aggressively sought to break up the protests, they targeted a Christian news editor who was reporting for a local media source. They beat him, broke his camera, arrested him, and in the process managed to break his leg.[245]

Christians in the area continue to be marginalized and targeted because of their religious identity. A news director for a radio station was told that the names of dead Christians could not be aired. Meanwhile, the Christian owner of the Paradise Hotel, in Bethlehem, was unable to find financial assistance from Islamic banks because of his religion; his hotel was destroyed by gunfire

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[243] Rozenmann, Eric. "False Premises, Repeated Errors in Robert Novak Column on Christian Arabs." CAMERA. 17 March 2006. <http://www.camera.org>.
[244] Weiner, Justus Reid. *Human Rights of Christians in Palestinian Society*. Jerusalem: JCPA, 2005. pg. 11.
[245] Rishmawi, George. Electronic Interview. 28 November 2007.

during the al-Aqsa Intifada.[246] There are scores of stories like these, some worse, that have plagued the Christian population in and around Bethlehem for over a decade. Meanwhile, the influential Muslim majority is incurring its effect upon the landscape of Bethlehem.

There is a mosque on the eastern corner of Manger Square. It is a popular sight for Friday prayers, so much so that congregants can not fit inside the building. Muslims in the community flow into Nativity Square and occupy the space weekly, as the Imam's sermon echoes throughout the town's hills, broadcasted from speakers installed on the minaret. Often, the weekly sermon is full of messages condemning Israel, the United States, and collaborators who work with non-Muslim groups. Christians are also held in contempt. Meanwhile, Muslim boycotts of the predominantly Christian stores around the square have caused many to close; direct intimidation has also been used.[247] A Lutheran reverend living in Beit Sahour commented that many Muslims go out of their way to visit Nativity Square, not to show respect for the Christian site, but "to assert their presence" to the minority there. He added that Christians are forced to halt their activity dare not interrupt or walk by the worshippers, for fear of being molested.[248]

Emigration

The myriad challenges to Palestinian Christians have been sustained long enough and have been amply prejudicial to create broad reaction from their communities. The most dramatic reaction has been a phenomenon of Christian emigration from the Holy Land. This also happens to be the most threatening to their survival in the region of Palestine. There are many reasons for the emigration trends. They include but are not limited to economic, political, familial, and religious factors. Census data and empirical evidence reveals steadily declining numbers through the

[246] Weiner, Justus Reid. *Human Rights of Christians in Palestinian Society*. Jerusalem: JCPA, 2005. pg. 11.
[247] Ibid. pg. 11.
[248] Rishmawi, Reverend Saliba. Personal Interview. 10 June 2007.

twentieth century. Data collected in Mandate Palestine revealed important developments. From 1914 to 1947, the year before the establishment of Israel, the Christian population more than doubled to approximately 143,000.[249] Another official estimate, meanwhile, put them at a little over 134,000.[250] However, based on percentages, they continually shrank as a minority population. In the course of thirty three years, they dropped from just over ten percent to only seven percent of the total population. Throughout the course of the next six decades, approximately, the presence of Christians in Palestine would decrease at an alarming rate.

Less than twenty years after Israel's War of Independence, the events of 1967 produced shifts in the political geography of the region. In response to this, new censuses were taken; these offer glimpses into the Christian population trends. The Israeli Census of 1967, for example, finds that Jerusalem's Christian population dropped from over 46,000 in 1945 to just under 11,000.[251] In the same twenty two year span, Ramallah's Christian population dropped by seventeen percent, to 6,966. Meanwhile, the Christian presence in the towns in and around Bethlehem had fallen to approximately 14,400.

Today, population shifts and emigration patterns have had tremendous effects on Palestinian Christianity. The area of Bethlehem, Beit Jala, and Beit Sahour, the Christian population is estimated to be around 22,000.[252] However, recent changes in local politics threaten the sustainability of this population. When the Palestinian Authority gained control of Bethlehem in 1994, Yassar Arafat officially redrew the boundaries of the municipalities. The new, larger towns included neighboring refugee camps and a local Bedouin tribe. All told, there was an increase of Muslim citizens by 33,000.[253] This shift, as well as the emigration of Christians, especially

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[249] *The Sabeel Survey*. Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, 2006. pg. 41.
[250] Hourani. A. H. *Minorities in the Arab World*. London: Oxford University Press, 1947. pg. 52.
[251] *The Sabeel Survey*. Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, 2006. pg. 42, 49.
[252] Ibid. pg. 43.
[253] Weiner, Justus Reid. *Human Rights of Christians in Palestinian Society*. Jerusalem: JCPA, 2005. pg. 10.

following the violence of the al-Aqsa Intifada, made the Christian communities minority populations. They counted as twenty percent of the population; a decade earlier, they constituted sixty percent. Bernard Sabella, a Christian member of the Palestinian parliament, says that just since the al-Aqsa Intifada began, more than three thousand Christians have left Bethlehem and the surrounding towns.[254]

The issue of numbers is not even the biggest concern for many Palestinian Christians, though it is a major one. One of the most concerning aspects of Christian emigration is that those who leave are among the most educated, talented, wealthy, and moderate. These are usually the ones with the means and the desire to leave the region that is destitute of rights, jobs, security, and opportunity. As mentioned earlier, the desire for higher education often draws Palestinian Christians abroad. Job opportunities and previously emigrated families also offer important draws. One Christian sociologist mentions, "Those who are unskilled, without education, or politically radical can't get visas."[255]

The numbers of Palestinian Christians continue to decrease elsewhere, meanwhile. In Nablus, current estimates put the Christian population at or around one thousand, which is down from a little over 1,500 sixty years ago.[256] Even in areas where the population number has increased, the percentage of Christians is always decreasing, as annual growth rates of other communities are consistently higher than those of the Christians. This reality perpetuates the minority status and feeling of marginalized existence among Palestinian Christians. Furthermore, it increases the Christian inclination to emigrate. Studies have found that the percentage of Christians with definite intentions to emigrate is twice that of Muslims.[257] Urban areas are home to the

[254] Finkel, Michael. "Bethlehem 2007 A.D." *National Geographic*. December 2007: pg. 84.
[255] Ibid. pg. 84.
[256] *The Sabeel Survey*. Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, 2006. pg. 45.
[257] Pacini, Andrea. ed. *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. pg. 141.

highest percentages of Christians wanting to emigrate, with Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Jerusalem topping the list.

Emigration is acting as a major bleed to the lifeblood of Palestinian Christianity. Although its cause is the same as its effect, it is a symptom that needs treating in order for Christians to maintain their presence in the Holy Land. Just before the turn of the twenty first century, it was estimated that the equivalent of twenty four percent of all Christians living in the Palestinian Territories were living abroad.[258] Every Palestinian Christian knows someone from their community who has left the region, for various reasons. Nearly every single Christian, meanwhile, has family members living outside of Israel-Palestine. Over the course of a century, Palestinian Christianity has gone from a substantial minority to mere fractions of percentages in most areas.

The trend of emigration has a pervasive effect upon the population left behind. It challenges their self confidence, communal integrity, political and economic sustainability, and hope for the future. When approached about the subject, most Palestinian Christians remark on the seriousness of the emigration trend. The also recognize that Christians choose to leave for any one or combination of reasons. However, there appears to be a distinct difference between those who emigrate and the Palestinian Christians who chose to stay. The former have either been pushed out by traumatic events or pulled by opportunities that are not available in their homeland. Many of them find it easier to leave because they know family members or friends who are already established elsewhere. The latter group, meanwhile, finds its lifestyle sustainable or sufficient. Some have not yet experienced traumas sufficient enough to push them out of their existing experiences. Others simply lack the opportunities, resources, or official documentation to leave.

The remaining Palestinian Christians appear to share strong faith and identities strongly founded in their religious beliefs. Communities living in Jerusalem, Beit Sahour, Bethlehem, and

[258] Ibid. pg. 135.

Nazareth are full of individuals who find deep pride in their ancestry and link to the land where Jesus once lived. When asked about the decreasing Christians population, a twenty seven year old Greek Orthodox man living in Jerusalem said:

> I mean, it's not the numbers that make the difference. It has never been like this in history. The problem is [that], as Christians, we have been here to witness the Resurrection. If I have said, 'you have seen the Resurrection,' [it is because] you have read it from the Bible. I have heard about the Resurrection because somebody has told my grandfather and my great great grandfather and his grandfather. […] And this is how I heard about the Resurrection. Most likely have not been told- have witnessed it. [We've] seen the sky- and the clouds come. I mean, so we are the ones who tell the rest that the Resurrection happened, not because of a book or not because somebody told me who came from a boat all the way from Jerusalem. I tell you because I witnessed. And we are keeping this.[259]

This man, and others, demonstrates fervent pride and commitment to his religion. Many Palestinian Christians today perceive their lives to be contributing to a larger, messianic mission. They recognize their unique identity, and translate that into a vital responsibility.

Palestinian Christian Activity

There are success stories from Christian participation and activity in their communities. In the West Bank towns of Beit Jala, Bethlehem, and Beit Sahour, the local YMCA branch is involved in a greater Christian network. It and twenty seven other organizations established a network around East Jerusalem and the Bethlehem area.[260] They are part of a growing trend for Christian organizations, communities, and churches to ally together in the region. There goal is a unified voice and message coming from the fractured Palestinian Christian community. There is also an

[259] Haramy, Omar. Personal Interview. 6 June 2007.
[260] Abu Zuluf, Nidal. Personal Interview. 9 June 2007.

intention to use such Christian organization networks to lobby for Palestinian Christian rights and more egalitarian treatment. However, it is clear that such moves are reactions to systemic, pervasive challenges to the Christian populations throughout the region. The efforts are, broadly speaking, rudimentary attempts towards an equal status that is severely lacking. They also seek to accomplish basic achievements in unifying the fractured population; this is daunting task that has gone unachieved for centuries.

One organization that actively seeks to unify Palestinian Christians through Israel and Palestinian Territories is the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center. Established in 1989 by Anglican priest Naim Ateek, the organization's purpose includes a sustained effort to "deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians," and "to promote unity among them toward social action."[261] The organization has worked feverishly to increase dialogue and cooperation between the Palestinian Christians of different denominations, languages, political beliefs, and locales.

When individuals within Sabeel speak with outsiders about their efforts, they share effervescent excitement about their successes within the Palestinian Christian community. Prayer groups, youth activities, and mission trips are some of the most frequently mentioned achievements. Sabeel, as well as some other Christian organizations, was involved in talks about drafts of the Palestinian Authority constitution. They assembled a team of lawyers to review one of the many drafts. Specifically, they lobbied for the elimination of the sentence proclaiming Islam to be the religion of the state.[262]

One example which demonstrates the level of fragmentation within the Palestinian Christian community comes from Sabeel's efforts. The organization hosts ecumenical meetings in order to improve contact and cooperation between different communities. They also sponsor conferences based on Palestinian Christian issues, often capitalizing on their disenfranchisement and

[261] *Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center*. 29 March 2008. <http://www.sabeel.org/>.
[262] Duaybis, Cedar. Personal Interview. 6 June 2007.

marginalization as a draw of intrigue and merit. One recent success that his highly touted by Sabeel is their ability to compile a version of the Lord's Prayer that Christian leaders from various churches agreed to read. This act of unity and solidarity is seen as a breakthrough by many involved. Agreement on a single reading of doctrinal beliefs was a large stride in the direction of Christian cooperation. However, it is seen by others as an indication of how deeply disjointed and indefatigably stubborn the communities remain.

Sabeel is making inroads throughout the Palestinian Christian community. Part of its popularity can most certainly be linked to Reverend Ateek's views towards the Hebrew Scriptures, Zionism, and the state of Israel. His views are most directly stated in his work *Justice and Only Justice*. It is portrayed as a sincere call for social justice and reconciliation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; in reality, it is part autobiography, part historical narrative, part manifesto. Ateek places a tremendous amount of blame on Israel and Zionists for the conditions of Palestinians, Christians and otherwise. He portrays supporters of Israel, particularly Zionists, as vindictive people who seek power and the disenfranchisement of Christians. [263] He also indicts Israel and its institutions for the lack of Arab unity. His words show that Anti-Semitism, as well as deep resentment for the establishment of the state of Israel, is a large component of the Palestinian Christian psyche to this day.

Ateek's contempt for the state of Israel and its policies is clearly grounded in a greater distrust, resentment, and prejudice towards Jews and the Hebrew Tradition. He attacks the Exodus story and shows how it should not be recognized because it compromises the rights and identity of Palestinians. Providing alternate narratives from books like Kings and Psalms, he dismisses "certain passages in the Old Testament" because "they reflect an early stage of human

[263] Ateek, Naim Stifan. *Justice, and Only Justice*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989. pg. 32.

understanding of God's revelation"; he adds that "their value lies partially in their negative aspect," for they "clarify what God is not."[264]

Ateek's approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict relates to the myth of Christian-Muslim synthesis and cooperation. Often promoted by "Western" missionaries in the region, it suggests that the indigenous populations coexisted peacefully before the rise of Israel. The theory suffers amnesia in relation to most interactions and events spanning the past fourteen hundred years. The issues of Dhimmitude, minority relations, and social status that have been discussed in previous chapters are largely dismissed within the context of this theory. The synthetic nature of the theory often leads to the incoherent political positions held by many current Palestinian Christians. They respond to psychological feelings of denigrated, minority status but also seek to accept a political theory that tells them of a coexistence myth. As such, their emotive and rational perspectives become muddled and paradoxical.

Ateek further developed a theological perspective that was based on abrogation, essentially saying that Jewish theology is archaic, simplistic, and erroneous. He elevated the position of Jesus and Christian teachings, writing that "to stand in the great prophetic tradition was to recognize the prophet's maturing understanding of God. Jesus represents the continuing link with the prophetic tradition."[265]

Ateek's characterization of Christianity and Jesus as member of the greater prophetic community is remarkably similar to the Islamic perception of Jesus. The Reverend's use of abrogation to dismiss Jewish beliefs as primitive also replicates Muslim patterns of religious interpretation. In a very subtle yet effective way, Ateek allied his message with the greater Palestinian Muslim population with which he lived on a daily basis. He sought to mobilize the Palestinian Christian community, against the Jewish state and towards the Muslim majority in the

[264] Ibid. pg. 82, 83.
[265] Ibid. pg. 98.

region. It is a shrewd political move. It is also indicative of the effect the Muslim majority has had on many Palestinian Christians throughout the centuries. His inclination towards abrogation and links to the Muslim community perhaps also derives from Dhimmi Syndrome self-abasement and desire to relate to the Islamic world.

There are discussions throughout the Palestinian Christian community about the need for dialogue between theirs and neighboring Muslim communities. Sabeel and other activist organizations eagerly seek to promote such communications and have found some results between Muslim religious heads and local clergy. However, others note that the desire for discourse is much more popular among Christians than it is their Muslim counterparts. There are even trends by some to assimilate Christian beliefs and "change identity" to resemble Muslims in order to entice the latter to interact.[266] This is reflective of the *dhimmi* relationships that continue to affect contemporary society in Palestine. Hierarchy still exists and many in the Muslim majority are willing and able to treat their Christian neighbors with condescension.

Seeking National Inclusion

Christian participation and eagerness to be accepted within the Palestinian national identity has produced significant pieces of nationalist rhetoric. Specifically targeting Israel and its occupation of the West Bank, there have been imagery and propaganda used by Palestinians that have clear Christian links. Oftentimes, Muslims participate in using this imagery. For example, when a group of protestors in the West Bank were demonstrating against the Israeli settlement of Har Homa, they bound themselves to crosses, symbolizing the crucifixion of Palestinian people and their rights.[267] In December 2000, the Palestinian newspaper *Intifada* printed a political cartoon in

[266] Rishmawi, Reverend Saliba. Personal Interview. 10 June 2007.
[267] Ye'or, Bat. *Islam and Dhimmitude.* Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002. pg. 275.

which a woman was being crucified, complete with images of the stigmata; her name was Palestine.[268]

Demonstrations against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank continue to use Christian imagery to this day. In June 2007, for example, Palestinians throughout the region demonstrated their defiance against Israel and its fortieth anniversary celebration of the 1967 war. At the Aida refugee camp, next to Bethlehem, Christian groups organized a "peace vigil" in defiance of the occupation and Israel's Security Fence. The demonstration was attended by many residents of the refugee camp, most of whom are Muslims.

During the event, young children from the local schools put on various cultural displays, including songs and dances. Near the end of the event, there was a skit in which children participated in an allegorical representation of Israel's military occupation in Palestine. Covered in an olive drab blanket, some children slithered around the others who were happily living subsistent, productive, peaceful lives. The green dragon surrounded them, cut them off, and killed any that sought to challenge its position. It was not until they prayed to God for salvation that St. George, on a humble donkey, arrived, killed the dragon, and let the Palestinian children lives happily throughout the land. The skit did not simply condone violence against their aggressors; it also inferred that the other must die in order for them to be free.

St. George has been used as a patron saint of the Palestinians. One of the most famous stories attributed to him involved a mighty serpent that surrounded a well needed by local inhabitants. The dragon demanded human sacrifices in order for them to access the water. St. George arrived and cut down the vengeful serpent, thus liberating the people and allowing them to live in peace. He was also a martyr for his faith, dying a torturous death at the hands of pagan oppressors. He never gave up his faith or his identity as a Christian.

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[268] Ibid. pg. 276.

Church Influence

The influential influx of foreign church bodies into Palestine has, in some cases, negatively impacted the indigenous population. Many Protestant denominations, such as the Anglicans, as well as long established Greek Orthodox patriarchs imposed foreign clergy upon Palestinian Christians. There was discontent that the clergy and the greater church lacked understanding, appreciation, or even respect of the local Arab population. Some held services in languages other than Arabic. The disconnect was pervasive and troubling to the local populations. Many of the foreign church bodies, meanwhile, held hostile opinions of the Palestinian Christians, thinking them to be simple and crude.[269]

Although these opinions did not develop into serious issues between them, there developed psychological and emotion problems pertaining to identity and exchange. To this day, many Palestinian Christians have memories of or continued problems with relating to their clergy. A seventy-three year old woman living in Jerusalem noted, "the Anglican Church was one of the first churches that had a Palestinian bishop in the fifties. [That meant that] the hierarchy of the churches, at one time, was all foreign. And that really created a big gap between the community and the church."[270]

Most churches today have local clergy, and some of them work closely together for the sake of the Christian population. However, many Christians throughout Israel and the West Bank wish that their churches were more socially active. They often feel that the clergy are more invested in preserving official relations with political and other religious leaders than providing for the laypeople. Others wish that the churches would implement more aggressive programs for youth, economic seminars, and campaigns to negotiate on behalf of Christians.[271] The divide between

[269] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Arab Christian.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. pg. 135.
[270] Khoury, Sameea. Personal Interview. 6 June 2007.
[271] Nasar, Laura George. Personal Interview. 8 June 2007.

church support, clergy activism, and community expectations has been a problem throughout the history of Palestinian Christianity. As mentioned earlier, church leaders in Palestine historically have sought to maintain their positions vis-à-vis the majority power. This has helped maintain church autonomy and communal integrity. However, it has also left local communities vulnerable when they have sought support.

Conclusion:
Hope for Survival

Contemporary Palestinian Christians have memories that trace back over two millennia. They are members of numerous ethnic communities and church doctrines. Their fragmentation throughout the centuries continues to this day, though there are new signs suggesting that an inclusive faith bond can be forged. It is out of necessity that cooperation will be gained. The population is caught within a geo-political, ethno-religious conflict that threatens all involved. The fact that Christians have been minority citizens in the region of Palestine for over one thousand years does not bode well for the current reality.

The first followers of Jesus strongly embraced their faith; they believed that a new covenant imbued them with hope of salvation, inclusion, peace, and prosperity. The earliest Christians strongly embraced their religious identity. There was also a strongly ethnic character to their communities, as linguistics, tribal relations, and familial relations influenced how they interacted. Such ethnic identities and dealings strongly defined the early developments and divisions of Christianity. Doctrinal schisms, mostly centered on the nature of Jesus' being, often fell along ethnic lines. The dramatic split between Orthodox and Monophysite sects was perpetuated by power struggles that were influenced by ethnic communities. Christianity developed within an

ethnicity based model for centuries. Within Palestine, this meant that Christian communities were often separated by beliefs or blood, or both.

The highly sectarian, localized character of governance in Palestine was not conducive for Christian unity. It was not worth the struggle for the different sects and communities to consolidate. Meanwhile, as mentioned above, doctrinal differences also inhibited such an option. Although Christians were majority populations and wielded substantial control over the region of Palestine by the seventh century, they were not synchronized. They lacked a single, predominant identity under which they all could unite.

The lack of cooperation amongst Christian communities in Palestine left them vulnerable to outside influence. Without preexisting institutions or motivation to bind them, it would become easy to divide and conquer. This is one of the many reasons why invading forces were so influential upon the Palestinian Christian populations.

Geographic location also had great influence on the history of Palestinian Christians. The Holy Land sits at the confluence of three great continents and tremendously important trade routes and roads. Powerful empires and dominant invaders swept through the region many times throughout the past two millennia. With the arrival of each new force, indigenous communities had to react, counteract, adapt, or assimilate. Byzantines, Sassanids, Arab Muslims, Umayyads, Abbasids, Crusaders, Fatimids, Mongols, Mamluks, Seljuk Turks, Ottoman Turks, and the British crown were some of the many outside forces that imparted their influence upon Palestine and its people.

There has been a distinctly heterogeneous character of the Christian population in the Holy Land throughout history. The myriad influences from innumerable sources have contributed to their identity. These influences have been both welcome and shunned, embraced and rejected. Their relative importance within Palestinian Christian identity has changed with political, social,

and economic situations. The mosaic of Palestinian Christianity has also lent itself to those outside forces spoken about earlier. Palestinian Christians have boasted various skills, professional trades, and intellectual pursuits; they were among the leading linguists and scholars since very early in their existence. This allowed members of their community to participate with many different powers.

The multi-faceted quality of Christians in Palestine allowed them to be highly adaptive. It allowed them to sustain and survive despite great challenges. This did not mean, however, that they were invulnerable to prejudice and persecution. Realities of ethno-religious politics left the minority Christians, as a whole, disadvantaged throughout Muslim hegemony. At times, persecution caused decreased numbers, social exclusion, and social trepidation. Throughout, *dhimmi* treatment and minority status left Palestinian Christians at the mercy of their Muslim brothers. Christians in the Holy Land have lived within an ethno-religious hierarchy for centuries. Identity differences and demographic realities have been consistent challenges to Palestinian Christianity throughout history.

The build up of European and American missionary presence in Palestine was a manifestation of Christendom's interest in the Holy Land. The influx of money, education, social institutions, and strategic influence was beneficial for community sustainability. However, the indigenous character of Palestinian Christianity was compromised. Monophysite, Eastern Orthodox, Greek Orthodox and other local religious churches saw their membership decline; proselytizing missions drew them away from the long impotent, local patriarchs. Meanwhile, the agendas of foreign bodies were conferred upon some local Christians.

Contemporary Palestinian Christians continue to be influenced by these missions. Dozens of churches maintain their presence in the Holy Land because of its importance to their theology. Their institutions, specifically private schools, continue to greatly influence Palestinian Christian

opportunities and their identity. This continues, just as so many other institutions, groups, and narratives influence the indigenous population.

Besides the innumerable sources of influence upon Palestinian Christianity identity and alliances, there are the challenges of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Constant tensions and periodic violence has been common for over a century; conflict between immigrant Jewish populations and indigenous peoples well preceded 1948. Palestinian Christians had long ago thrown their hats in with Arabism and Palestinian nationalism. Their pursuit for inclusion and success within the ethno-nationalist community continues to this day. There have been successes, as many Christian figures led the charge for local nationalism and a Palestinian state. Nevertheless, their support for the Palestinian front has proved to be very damaging. Today, Christians in Israel-Palestine suffer the same fate as all Arabs living in the region. In the state of Israel, they deal with the consequences of embracing the Arab label. In the West Bank, they suffer the horrific costs of military occupation, armed conflict, rationing, economic depression, intimidation, and the dehumanization of security measures like checkpoints.

Contemporary Palestinian Christians live with a two-front conflict pertaining to their identity. They are members of the losing side of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and they continually struggle for completely egalitarian membership within the Palestinian community. Nearly fourteen hundred years of Muslim dominance in the region has left its seemingly permanent mark on communal relations. *Dhimmi* treatment and Islam's hierarchical view of inter-religious contact enduringly affected how the Christians are perceived and how they perceive themselves. Third party observers of Palestinian Christians witness actions that indicate deprecating views of self and religious community. Most share deep pride and firm embrace of their Christian faith. However, their opinions and actions vis-à-vis Muslim neighbors are dramatically different. They assume that Muslim primacy is the nature order. Some quietly accept Islam's presence in their lives

and, for instance, the influence of *shari'a* law in daily transactions. Their psyches are representative of the hugely pervasive and systemic divides that continue to this day within Palestinian society. While pragmatic and daily interactions increase, there still remains an underlying tension and presumed differentiation between the religious communities. Without reconciliation, it will continue to threaten manifestation. There is a very important difference between being able to participate in society, and being able to participate without prejudice or resentment. The line between the two is where uncertainty and disquiet fear lay.

There are even some Palestinian Christians who hold the opinion that Christians are over-represented and given too many rights, despite their numbers. These individuals are the strongest examples of how *dhimmi* status and treatment have been engrained into society and even psyche. These and other Palestinian Christians have not simply acknowledged their lower role within the dominant Muslim society. They have internalized the denigration and believe in their dehumanized status. They have accepted a second class status.

* * *

The Christians living in Israel-Palestine today appear to be facing insurmountable odds. The population has been decreasing rapidly for nearly a century; this follows generations of either stagnant or slowing deteriorating numbers. The basic issue of survival is even in question. Emigration is, perhaps, the greatest threat to the Palestinian Christian population today. If violence, economic desperation, denigration, and political uncertainty continue, then there is every indication that Christians will follow their families and friends elsewhere. Waves of past emigrants have proved the relative ease of escaping the issues of Israel-Palestine.

Emigration continues to sap the indigenous population of their brightest, most spirited, and youngest members. It also leaves the residual population even more vulnerable to exploitation, intimidation, or silencing. It is a paralyzing agent. It is the opinion of this author that Palestinian

Christian emigration will continue, perhaps at a steadily or slowly decreasing rate, barring any drastic changes that benefit the community. As the population decreases, the rump numbers will contain those who are less and less willing to leave, thus leading to the decreased rate. It is possible that continued emigration will cause Christian villages and neighborhoods to disappear. Even missionary posts and institutions may close for lack of local Christians. Eventually, there would remain a small number of highly devout, conservative Christians that live within tightly knit communities in and around the holy sites. The Palestinian Christians would have great difficulty sustaining themselves, but would succeed despite the constant possibility of failure.

Only drastic changes to the status quo will prove beneficial to Palestinian Christians. Recent efforts to raise awareness of their existence, as well as moves to establish cooperative efforts between the different churches, could prove promising. They would need to trump long established parochialism and feuding, however. Foreign investment would also prove highly beneficial for the Palestinian Territories, as well. One of the most realistic and feasible events would be the pledge of unfailing support to Christians in the Holy Land on behalf of greater Christendom. In a region where religious identity is increasingly defining, the small population of Palestinian Christians is one of the few players without substantial outside support.

* * *

The most enigmatic and powerful aspect of the Palestinian Christian consciousness is a truly unwavering embrace of hope. Nearly every person you come in contact with has faith that their situation will improve and that they will be able to live in peace with their neighbors. That hope is deeply rooted in their religion, their faith, and their position as “living stones” within the Christian church. It allows them to maintain strength and pride despite outrageous misfortunes and extreme injustices.

Some embrace hope so emphatically that they act irrationally. Reverend Ateek wrote, "Hope in the midst of injustice and oppression, however, can produce passivity, and it can be frustrated."[272] In this way, a number of Palestinian Christians have ended their engagement in the problems around them. They have, instead, gone to prayer or religious worship and wait for salvation. Others' hope has blinded them to the complexity of the issues around them.

Despite this, hope has been a tremendous benefit for Palestinian Christians. It has helped them maintain their faith, love, and religious pursuits despite desperation and even prosecution. In this way, the Palestinian Christians offer to the world an example of strength under duress. Their human struggles pale in comparison to their devotion to faith and their commitment to the new covenant. As one Palestinian reverend noted, "as they say, 'hope is the last to die.' So there is always hope. And actually, only that hope is keeping us here in the land and continuing our ministry through the people; not only [to] the Christians, but to [all] our people living here in this time."[273]

Different cultures, religions, ethnicities, rulers, governments, and historical events have influenced Palestinian Christians. They have altered and adapted for two millennia. They face unbelievable challenges that will further modify the characteristics of their communities. But through all the divisions, schisms, shifts, and losses, the most basic and profound element of their religion has survived. Through it all, the Christians in the Holy Land have used hope for survival.

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[272] Ateek, Naim Stifan. *Justice, and Only Justice*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989. pg. 134.
[273] Naoum, Hosam & Na'el abu Rahmoun. Personal Interview. 7 June 2007.

Appendix A:

Interview Transcripts

NOTE: *In all transcripts, italicized text denotes the interviewer's words. Bolded words were emphasized by the individuals, themselves; the text emphasis is meant to relay the tone of the subject. Numbers found in parentheses denote time on the recording track. Words in brackets describe events occurring during the course of the interview.*

Transcript
Interview: Cedar Duaybis
Wednesday 6 June 2007
Sabeel Jerusalem

Craig: This is Craig Noyes hear interviewing on Wed. June 6, 2007 at Sabeel Jerusalem. And, just for the record, what is your full name?

Cedar: Cedar, like the cedar tree, Duaybis. My family name is Duaybis.

And how old are you?

71.

And where were you born?

Haifa. Haifa, Palestine. That was before Israel was established.

And where have you lived in your life?

Well, I grew up in Haifa until I was 12 years old, when we fled, you know. Just before the establishment of the state of Israel, it was in April. We fled from Haifa because of severe fighting in- up in Nazareth and after that. Then I married an Anglican priest. And the church moved us from one place to another. So we lived in Nazareth for 8 years. We went to Haifa- to a very different Haifa than the one I grew up in- spent 5 years in Haifa, and then the church moved us to Nablus. Nablus is in the north of the West Bank, the center of the country, which is called Samaria in the Bible. And then we moved to Ramallah, after which my husband retired and later died and I moved back to Jerusalem. This is a different story; it is a story of my identity card. I didn't always have it. I wasn't always a citizen of the state of Israel because they can deprive us of it at random, and I was deprived of it when I lived in Nablus, with my family. And, about 2½ years ago I moved to Jerusalem, so now I live in Jerusalem. So I've been all over. Born in Palestine, grew up in Israel. Served on the West Bank, now back in what they- in occupied East Jerusalem. It's called Jerusalem by Israel but where I live it's part of occupied East Jerusalem.

Now, did you participate in the Sabeel Survey?

(2:15) Yeah, sure. I had a major part in the Sabeel Survey. What do you mean, 'participate?'

Did you take the-

No. No. I was the one that revised the… One of the major things I do- I am one of the founders of Sabeel- part of the group of people who founded Sabeel. But what I found myself good at- what I do at Sabeel is edits, revised translations, make careful that things are accurate. I- we produce books after our conferences. So I had a major part in reviewing the translation, because it came out in English and in Arabic. I reviewed the translation. I made sure that every- I compared the analysis with the tables. So I did a lot of work but I was not part of those interviewed and I was not part of those who did the research.

Did you want to tell us the story about how you desired and then got the motivation to establish Sabeel? They were telling us how it started off, initially, as a Bible study group.

Sabeel was not a desire, it was a need. We couldn't have survived as Palestinian Christians, in terms of holding onto our faith, without Sabeel. Those of us who take our faith seriously, and who need to live out their faith. Because of the establishment of the state of Israel and because the

whole world was rejoicing at the fulfillment of prophecy. Now, I- you know- 'quote un-quote.' Uh, Palestinian Christians could not go on believing what they believed before the state of Israel. Especially those of us who wanted to be, um, genuine Christians. So, we had to find a way to bring to terms our faith with the reality of our lives. Our faith clashed, in 1948, with the reality of our lives. And only Palestinian Christians felt that, and experienced that, because the rest of the world either didn't care. Some people thought this was a political state and, you know, that choose religion in order to find a basis, or a justification for its establishment. And the other part of the world believed that God gave it to the Jews- did not think of the Palestinians. And this was 1948 and 1967 and all the time throughout- it is a fulfillment of prophecy and a miracle. 1967 is believed to be, by many Israelis, to be a miracle from God in order to bring- for the ingathering of Jews […] to bring the chosen people back to their Promised Land. Now this left us out all together. This left us out altogether. The Bible is our holy book. But suddenly, it started to slap us in the face. It looked like it was the cause of our destruction. It was the justification for all that had happened to us. You know, people did not care that we had become refugees- we were driven out of our homes. People did not care that we were, you know, Christians who were **people of the land**. We are the indigenous people of the land! So, many thought that if we were **real** Christians we would just move out of the way of the fulfillment of God's plan and give it to Israel. Because, that- that's God's plan. And so that you know, the rest of the plan would be fulfilled and the second coming of Christ will take place. And many Christian Zionists believed that for that to happen- for the second coming to happen, and for Armageddon- this big battle, to happen- um, the Jews need to come back to their Promised Land and establish a state and rebuild the third temple. So **this** we cannot believe. We are Palestinian Christians. So we started to- many people wanted to throw away the Old Testament. Many people stopped to go to church because they couldn't bring to terms with what they believed and what happened to them in 1948. And to us if felt **very** unjust. To us, it felt that it could not be from God, because God cared- God, uh- God we knew through Jesus Christ, uh, cared for everybody. It was an open people hood before God, and everybody can be a child of God and part of this Christian community. So there was something wrong there, and we did not know how to deal with it and the church was not ready to give us answers, because the church itself was a victim of what happened in 1948. It was **split**, like the country! Part of the church- the bishop was here, in Jerusalem, in the Old City, and could not come to Nazareth, where I grew up, where I lived, because he was Palestinian and he could no go there! And he was on the black list of the Israeli government. So the clergy fled. The clergy, like everybody else, fled the country, hoping to come back within 2 weeks, 3 weeks a month at most because we fled from a state of fighting. We fled for our lives. And, it was not- I mean, we could not imagine that anybody would stop us from coming back our homes, which is what happened. So there was only one clergy person, only one clergyman, that was left in the whole of what became Israel, and the church needed help. Another thing that happened to the church, it became the major source of help and rescue for the Palestinians- especially Christians, but for everybody. It gave us shelter, in the schools and institutions. It brought bundles of food and clothing from outside to help the people. So the church was catering- was looking after the physical needs of the people and did not think of the theological problems that we had. Neither did we, to begin with. We had lost all our property- all our possessions- those of us who became refugees, either refugees who had fled the country and had found themselves in Lebanon, or Syria, or Jordan, or Egypt. Or those of us who became internal refugees- like myself, my family, and many others- who fled from Haifa to Nazareth, or one part of the country to another. But usually to Galilee, because that's where Israel directed the people. They put us all in the Galilee and, um, **broke** the Galilee into **52** parts! And we needed a permit to go from one part to another, which was next door. See, like now, like what they're doing now with the wall and the checkpoints. [SIGH AND GASP] So, to put us under the [?]. So the first need that we

had- the immediate need was- a roof over our head, food to eat, clothes to wear, some money to spend, and… nobody thought of theology. But we needed to **pray**. We needed to draw on our holy book for support, for comfort, for hope, for sustenance, for spiritual sustenance- it was there… it had **gone**. It had gone! Because what we read in the Old Testament justified what happened. It was written in a way- it **is** written in a way- that justifies the establishment of a state of Israel. Or so some people **interpreted**- interpreted. So for a **very** long time, Palestinian Christians who really **cared** about their faith, um, could not cope. In church, we heard all the time the first readings from the Old Testament, the second readings from the New Testament- we couldn't hear the Old Testament because it was something that seemed to be the cause of our destruction- the cause of the Naqba, we call it, in Arabic, the word Naqba it was happened- it means 'catastrophe.' It was **there**, in the Bible, and people used it! And when people used it, it didn't see us. In order to take us into consideration, to know about us, they had to **see** us, they had to **meet** us. And this did not happen. And **when** they see us, we became the obstacle in the way of God's plan. Or we became the terrorists who were up against the, you know, against the state of Israel, wanting to destroy Israel. This added to our situation. Who were we? So we had lost our possessions- our material possessions. We lost our identity. We went to bed one day as Palestinians. We woke up as Israeli citizens, but not quite, because we couldn't be Israeli **nationals**, because Israeli nationals were only the people who were **Jewish**. In, in religion and in, in ethnicity. In, in… yes, in ethnicity. Now, we- our religion was different and we were, we had a different nationality- we were Arab, and Palestinians- so we couldn't be nationals. And gradually, we discovered although we were citizens, we did not have the full rights like nationals. They had benefits, they had privileges, they had- uh- [faculties] that were not given to citizens of the state of Israel. So we lost our identity. Until this day we don't exactly know who were are, but it's better now. And we lost our faith- or it's had a very big shaking. We were searching- we were groping. We were lost like- lost in a desert, not knowing where, where our direction was because of the establishment of the state of Israel. So those **very** important three things that make up a **person**- our material possessions, our faith, and our identity- had gone. We were strangers in a familiar land. This was our land, this was our country. But we were strangers in it and we were seen as strangers, very much **unwanted** strangers. Not welcomed strangers. This is how I grew up, and this is how Palestinians grew up **inside** Israel. Now, Sameea has a very different story because she was never inside Israel, she was never a citizen of Israel. And this is what led to the establishment of Sabeel. So it was not a desire, it was a way out. It was something the people needed in order to hold on to their faith. And without our faith- and **believe me**, I tried- I thought, as a child at 12 years old, and then I went to confirmation classes- I'm Anglican. Uh, I took my faith seriously, and it seemed to me at some time that I had to decide between being Christian and being Palestinian. Those two sides of my identity did not seem to go together. And I had to choose- I did. I tried, I experimented with just being Christian! I mean, it didn't matter if I was Palestinian- it didn't work. I was a Palestinian Christian. And then I tried to throw away my faith and did just as a Palestinian- resisting the injustice, resisting what happened to us non-violently. Non-violence has always been very much part of who I am, who my family is, and who my faith- what my faith taught me. So, it was never an option- **never an option**. Besides I believed- over and above it not being in me, violence- it's not a viable way. I don't believe that violence can get us anywhere. So, this was an added burden. It's easier to pick up a stone and throw at an army car. It's easier to become part of a group who resists Israel with arms, or, with whatever- at least with stones. I could not join that. So, it made it easier for me to resist peacefully, as a Christian. But this was the way that I didn't choose. This was the way- this was the only way that was open for me. So […] we were groping… Palestinian Christians were groping in the dark, trying to find our way in every sense of the word. And trying to survive physically in a very, **very** unfriendly atmosphere. Israel, until now, there are the new historians who write the story as it

really happened. They say Israel should have finished what it did- it should have finished. Either driven them all out or killed as many of them as possible. Israel should have finished the job because now they are stuck with a problem of demography. Our numbers grow very, very quickly. Our birth rate is the highest in the world, I think. So, whether inside Israel, or Israel and the West Bank, our numbers are growing **very** fast- 'scaryingly' fast for Israel. And since it was established as a Jewish state, that left us out. So when our numbers grew, it threatens the 'Jewishness' of the state, and this is the greatest problem that Israel has. And now they build walls, they put checkpoints, they withdraw people's identity cards, they have this **voluntary** transfer policy. You know, they make life so difficult so that people would leave voluntarily, because they cannot survive anymore. Because it is too difficult for them to live. And because there is no horizon for their children. There is no future. So if they want their children to live a better life- 71 years old in this, you know, it is not something easy. 12 years old, until 12 years old, I lived in peace. But, it was, mounting- the unrest, the clashes. Cause I lived during the time of the Mandate. And the unrest was brewing **all the time**. It was there. You know, it came and went in waves. And I was a child when we had the 6 month revolt and the strike. So, all my life I have been in this. And I don't want my children to live the same way. Now I have grandchildren. And it looks like there is no relief in sight- there is no horizon, for people, for people… to see. So when Sabeel was established it was like – [DEEP SIGH]. You know. This is something that we can identity with. And the way it happened, you know, the founder of Sabeel is Naim Ateek who went through the same circumstances that I went through. He was a refugee from Beesan in the Jordan Valley. Israel directed them to, uh, Nazareth, because they wanted to concentrate us in a place where they can [?] us in. He is the son of a lay-leader in the Anglican Church. He took his faith very seriously, and he was determined- since he was a child- to become a priest, to be ordained, and to serve Palestinian Christians. So he went to the States to study and came back and the people still had the same questions. What is the nature of God? Does God prefer one people to others? Does God consider us an obstacle in the way of his plans- his, her- God's plans. Should we move out and support Israel to establish a homeland or a state in this country… [DEEP BREATH] is it the Promised Land? Are they the chosen people? Does it not matter that Jesus came and we have the new covenant, the New Testament? Did it change things? Did it not change things? There were **so** many questions that people needed answers to, in order to go on living as Palestinian Christians. Now, Naim took this very seriously, and when he came back to serve his people, he was stationed, he was positioned in- it was a village at the time, Shifana near Nazareth, it is now a town… and growing very fast. He could not have an effective ministry without finding answers for the people, or at least beginning to find answers. So he took time off. And went to the States and started to read the Bible with Palestinian eyes, and that makes all the difference. (17:05) Like, you know, all liberation theologians that talk from the point of view of a need- a group of people who go through an experience. Poverty in Latin America, racial discrimination in South Africa, feminism- being a women- in the Christian world, um, and other things that drive people- being in a situation of injustice like us in Palestine. **This** is what creates liberation theology. People want to be liberated from a situation they are in, and they want to liberate their faith from, um, from what is restrictive, from what stands in the way of them becoming fully human. From what stands in the way of them, their having the fullness of life- living a full life. This is liberation theology. So, Naim, when he started to read the Bible with Palestinian eyes he found good news for the Palestinians. But, there were ways that we read the Bible that were different. I will come to this right now. So we started with Bible study- this is the question you started with. Because, that, that was where the problem was. In the Bible, in the Old Testament of the Bible. It was ecumenical right from the beginning. And Naim Ateek was in charge of St. George's Cathedral, the Palestinian congregation there. We were a tiny congregation but we always had groups coming from outside, pilgrims and tourists who

came and worshipped on Sunday with us. So the church was a tiny Palestinian congregation and people from outside who are trying to find out, like yourself, about Palestinian Christians and what was happening here. So outside the church we would meet and they would ask us questions and sometimes they were very surprised about our feelings and our questions because it hadn't occurred to them. They didn't have the same experience. So Naim's sermons and talks in church were very 'here and now,' you know. He would read the Bible in view of what was happening outside of the church. And people would come with their problems. Somebody had their land confiscated, somebody had a member of the family arrested, somebody had their home demolished, somebody had relatives who could not come back to the country, who became refugees. How- what is God saying to us here and now? What does the Bible say to us? So this is what he spoke about in church. And after the church he started a discussion to talk about the sermon. And people would bring their problems, their sorrows, their suffering. They cried, they shouted, they were angry, they were bitter, they were puzzled, they were perplexed. But they wanted to find out. They wanted comfort and peace and, and live as Christians. This is how it started. And our Bible studies were amazing in the way we, you know. If we take the book of Joshua. If you take the excerpt right from the beginning. The exodus is a story of liberation for the Israeli people. It is a paradigm of liberation for- liberation theology in South America! They can use it. It's a paradigm of liberation theology for South Afri- for the discriminated against. For us, it cannot be. Because the freedom of one people became the bondage of another. They came into **our** country. We are the people of the land. Joshua led the people, and they always said, "God told us to do that. God brought them out of Egypt, from bondage. He, you know, they suffered from 40 years in the wilderness. He brought them across the river in to this land. He told them to exterminate the people, to kill everything that breathed. To drive people out, to uproot the trees. Now this is us. This is **our** history. This is the other side of the story! The **dominant** side of the story is the, is the people of Israel, you know. Although we don't believe that **this** Israel is the same as the Israel in the Bible. It's completely different. This is a political state. But we were the other side of the story that **nobody** considered. So in 1948 the story was revived! It was, like, a second exodus, a second Joshua, a second- eh- occupation of the country. It was **very** similar to it. It was a continuation of it. And it was **justified** by it. And this we cannot take. Because we would be negating ourselves if we adopt that story. So we had to have our own story, and it had to be based and rooted in the Bible. We lifted that up. For me, when we say 'pharaoh,' I see Israel. Now 'pharaoh' is not, you know, just a person. 'Pharaoh' is the oppressor. 'Pharaoh' is the tyrant. 'Pharaoh' is the- he would not let the people be. 'Pharaoh' is the person to whom the prophet cried, 'let my people go!' For me, it applies **exactly** to Israel. Israel is my oppressor, because I am a Palestinian. It doesn't matter as a Christian. Israel is that tyrant. Israel does not let our people **go**. I would like to cry to Israel, 'let my people go!' See. So, there was a switching of roles, whether we liked it or not, in our minds. And the conclusion is that God is on the side of the oppressor. It was them, at that time- the Israeli people, the Israelites- it is now us, and our people in the world. I am not only talking about us. I am talking about our story. There was this adaptation, this twisting around because of our experience- it could not be any other way. You say 'pharaoh,' I see Israel. You say 'freedom,' that's what I'm calling for. You see Exodus as a liberation story, for me- I have my own liberation story, and that's what I care about. That's who I am and that's what I am striving for, in a **peaceful** way. So, this is how Sabeel started. And, and we had a conference. Naim wrote- I don't know if you read his book or not. Did you?

I have not read it, no.

(Pause)

What's the- what's the name of that book?

Justice and Only Justice. I will… we sell it here. I will show it to you in a moment.

Okay.

He wrote this book and, um, we had a conference, at the [Tontour] Theological Institute to place our theology in the context of other liberation theologians. And we invited liberation theologians from all over the world to come and hear our story and for us to hear their story so that we will be placed in this context. It was a very successful, uh, conference. And later it was- the, the papers, the, the talks- were compiled in a book called Faith and the Intifada. Because that was in 1990 at the height of the First Intifada. And so here we were- Palestinian Christians- peaceful people… uh, our holy book was the Bible but our land was Palestine and we were part of the Intifada, though a peaceful part of the Intifada. We never resorted to violence. So, that was the beginning. And then there were ten people that Naim called who were concerned Christians- young and old, men and women, clergy and lay people… um… who were **really** concerned that Palestinian Christians won't hold on to their faith, would continue to live [DEEP BREATH] under occupation as much as was necessary and into liberation, finally, into statehood, finally but to help other people and hold onto their faith and remain Christian. So, what started in our heads and our hearts- because of a need and not a desire, to go back to your question- now, turned into programs to help other people. That's how we established a center. First it was just up here [SIGNALING TO HEAD] and here [SIGNALING TO HEART]. So in 1993 we registered with the Israeli government as a non-profit organization. And we started with a table and a chair and then we had a room at St. George's [Cathedral] and then we had two rooms and a bigger place, now was have this- two apartments open to each other. And we have many programs, dealing with the family, with the-the, youth. Especially, **youth**- I am a mother and now a grandmother. To bring up children to be Christian, non-violent, uh, peace loving, to remain human- to be **sane**- in **this** atmosphere is an impossible job. So this is what we struggled with, as Christians mothers. You know, I served- I, my husband and I, my family served in Nablus, which is like Gaza. It is one of the hottest spots, in Palestine and Israel. Because there's always an Intifada there. And the Israeli army **really** strikes hard- **everyday**- everyday people get killed. Our home was broken into several times. My husband was arrested. My children were arrested. Just for going to school. For, for doing nothing because it was against everybody. And, um, we lived under curfew for long periods of time. We were deprived of **everything**. Our children- young men like yourself. I have two boys and two girls who can not even **walk** in the street, let alone exercise or, or have sports or have entertainment or have a club or to go anywhere. It was impossible. **Just** to walk down the street, there were soldiers who would arrest them. Now this was an, a job that was impossible. Now, to think that they're still human, that they're still alive, they're still non-violent, they're still working for peace, they're still **there**, they're still around is a miracle. And this is something that every Palestinian mother went through. And it's not getting better, it's getting worse. Let me stop here and see what your next question is [LAUGHING THROUGH END OF SENTENCE]… I can go on and on and on.

[…]

We never had a desire for Sabeel. Sabeel was something, you know- we needed an **answer**. We needed a way out. We needed help. We were crying for help, and Sabeel helped us, and still is helping. Many Palestinian Christians **and** Muslims- we have an inter-faith program, you know. We try- we're part of the Palestinian people. I am Christian but my culture is Arab and, therefore, **Muslim**. So I feel a very, you know, we are the same people, except that we worship differently.

Can you describe […] that inter-faith contact and the communication you have with the Muslim people, through Sabeel, and also in your life?

In our life, there is no separation. I was born with Christians, and- in a Christian and Muslim neighborhood. I went to school with Christians and Muslims. I taught- I was a teacher with Christians and Muslims. Our friends- our family friends- and my own friends are Christians and Muslims and we don't differentiate. **Nowadays**, the problem is- there **are** some problems because, like… um, Islam has become the threat to the West. Or, the **West** conceives- perceives Islam as its enemy. This affects us, as well. And it's all because of global policy and because of Israel in our- it's regional and it's global. This, um, fight against terror, which is connected with Islamism or military Islam…it has different names. So, but when I grew up, in Nazareth, the Christians were the majority in Nazareth, but we elected a mayor. One time it was a Christian mayor the other time is was a Muslim mayor. We all voted for each one of us and they all treated- whether it was Christian or it was a Muslim- they treated the people the same. And, I am partly Muslim, in culture, and the Muslims are partly Christian in culture because the contact was very close. So there was no differentiation. I never, in my life, had any problem with any Muslim [FAINT SOUND OF JET ENGINE IN THE DISTANCE]. Nowadays, there are problems in neighborhoods. You know, life is very hard. And when people are- and we are- we live in a prison. In the West Bank in several prisons. In Gaza it's one big prison- open air prison, but it's a prison, nonetheless. So when you shut up people in a room, or in a prison, or in a closed place, they get it out on each other. This is partly why there is more friction, now, between Christians and Muslims. Another reason is, Israel is **very** pleased when there is friction because Israel would like to shift the focus from the political problem to the religious problem and make it look like a Muslim-Christian problem, and like Muslims are against Christians and against Jews. So Israel fans the fire of this friction, because it [?] the pressure on it, the political pressure, to, you know, give independence to the Palestinian people. So- and there is more fanaticism within Islam now because many people believe that the reason why we have failed in our wars and failed to reach independence is because God is angry because people are not adhering to their faith they should do. Eh, they should have- they should do. So many Muslims believe that if they go back to their faith- if they cling to the tenets of their faith- if they become better Muslims, then they have a more chance of getting out of this mess that we are in. (30:15) […] So there are many different reasons why, nowadays, it is not as good- the relations- as they were. But still, **by and large**, relations between Christians and Muslims are fine. And we do not separate. Even this inter-faith program. We don't like to call it inter-faith; it's living together. It's the dialogue of life, of living together. But we must be careful and watch for signs, of fanaticism- on both sides. Christians are also, there are many fanatic Christians who do not want to mix with Muslims. Or because… um, you know… Christian Zionism- we haven't yet spoken about Christian Zionism- has made a wedge between Muslims and Christians in this land because some Muslims perceive Christians as being part of the West. And because Christian Zionists side with Israel blindly and unconditionally, Muslims put us as one group of Christians. As, as all of us alike, being- against Israel or against the West or very much pro-Israel. So this has also created hatred and created resentment by the Muslims. This is the very big disservice that Christian Zionism is doing to us here and making a solution harder to reach. So the situation has changed, I cannot say it hasn't. Now, Sabeel, only tries to… to restore- no, I don't want to use the word restore- to keep, to try and preserve this good relationship of one people. One Palestinian people, Christian and Muslims. We never discuss creed or the tenets of faith because that's theological. We leave that to the theologians and there is no use in arguing about whether Jesus was crucified or wasn't crucified. Or, you know, no- no side is going to convince the other side. So what we concentrate on is what we have in common. And I would say we have 90% in common

and 10% differences. So we don't concentrate on our differences, we concentrate on our similarities, on what we have in common. Now **our** numbers are decreasing- that doesn't help.

Why do you- I mean. The rate of emigration, as see from many different surveys, [reveals] that emigration from the Christian population is considerably higher than the emigration of the Muslim population from this area. What do you think accounts for that?

Number one- is it's easier. The host countries prefer Christians, especially nowadays with this campaign against Islam. So, neither the United States nor Canada nor Australia nor Europe want Muslims. They prefer to take- so they make it easier for us to process our papers […] Most of the Christians families already have relatives there because this wave of emigration started at the beginning of the 20th century. It's not new. People emigrate for many different reasons and there's emigration all over the world. So mainly, at that time, because of, you know, better opportunities on the outside- better jobs; it's easier to earn your living. So people have been emigrating and Christians have- Christians perceive the other countries as being Christian, you know. We perceive the United States as a Christian country, although maybe it's not. And England is a Christian- Europe is Christian. Canada is Christian, mainly, and Australia is Christian. So… people like to be with the majority. We are a minority- a religious minority. We are **not** a minority- uh… we are a religious minority. And some people want to be part of a majority of Christians. Although this… this does not exactly apply. So, there is a will for the host countries to accept us and a will for us to go and live in Christian countries. This is one. Now the hardship of life and the instability and the political situation is driving Muslims and Christians out. But because it is easier for Christians to leave, then more Christians leave than Muslims. And **because** our numbers are few, it shows more. I mean, it looks like, you know- […] when one person leaves from a Christian community, it shows. Cause our numbers are one point something- a very fraction of a percent. So there are many reasons and we have relatives outside that can make it easier for, you know- parents come first then close relatives. So it's easier for our relatives who are in all those countries to pull us there, process our papers, and take us out. But the political, economic situations are the major reasons. Also, in search of job opportunities and education and a better future for our children. We want our children to live in peace. But **also** the Muslims want that. But the- Muslims people, you know… In the United States it has become very difficult for Muslims to go, because they are… Just the way you look. When my son came to visit- he lives in Los Angeles […] You know, it's against the law in the United States to ask about your religion at the… in the airport. So he was standing in line and they asked, 'what holidays do you keep?' [PAUSE AND GRIN] Some people caught it and they said, 'we keep Christmas and Ramadan and' uh- you know- just to confuse the uh, uh- yeah. Now my son, when he came, it was- at the beginning of this- very close to 9/11 and when he said, he said, 'I keep Christmas and Easter' and immediately knew he was Christian and they search him less, they treat him better, they allow him to go, you know. He's not a suspect, especially if he looks like- he's a little bit, he's not very dark. Although, his brother- my other son- is dark with dark hair. He becomes a suspect. So it is easier for Christians to integrate outside than Muslims and now, you know, if you have the wrong name, then you are a suspect. If you look wrong, if you look Middle Eastern, then you are a suspect. If you speak Arabic, then you are a suspect. This does not encourage Muslims to leave and go live there. It encourages Christians. So those are the reasons.

*[Speaking about the concept of Dhimmitude] Do feel that there is any consequences of Dhimmitude that **push** people out because of treatment by Muslims?*

A few. A few, yes. A few cannot accept that. Now, this is in the Koran. I hear- I live very close to a mosque. I mean, wherever you live you are close to a mosque but I live **very** close to a

mosque. So I can hear every word he says and I can hear the sermons on Friday and I hear every- Now, when they recite, before the call to prayer, it is very often about this, 'do not be suspect to Christians and Jews.' It is in the Koran. And when they believe that the Koran was dictated word by word to the prophet Muhammad they can't get out of that! Now, many of them don't care. I know more secular Muslims than religious Muslims. But it's there. So, and most of the Arab countries have Islam as the religion of the state. Now, we are drafting our own constitution in Palestine. And we tried- Sabeel brought together a group of lawyers who tried to- we read, I think it was the second draft or the third draft of the constitution and we changed everything that was discriminatory against-. So, we tried to change […] the religion of the state. It used to say- it still says- the religion of the state is Islam. We tried to influence them to make it- and there were Muslims, also, who wanted it to be like that. The majority of the people in the state are Muslim but not the religion of the state. Now, the committee was convinced. But this constitution has to have a referendum, it has to go to the people to approve it, and it will never be approved if the religion of the state is not Islam. Even by secular Muslims! Because all the Arab countries, I mean. They think it's their right. But they do not apply it, they do not allow it to discriminate against Christians. But there is this thing. I know that in Jordan. I know people who complain that they were not promoted in their jobs- in their government jobs, or in whatever organization- because they were Christian. There is something of this in it. But they cannot… [PAUSE] you know, it's difficult to overcome. It's in the Koran, 'do not be subject to Christians and Jews.' It's there. So sometimes it's unintentionally done, but there is some truth in this. Now, how many people are driven out by this? I don't know, but I know that some people complain that they were not promoted or though they had qualifications that qualified them to be head of the department or a certain minister, or something. But they were not promoted because they were Christian. There is something of that. It wouldn't drive me out. It wouldn't drive people I know out because I know I live in a Muslim atmosphere and there are things that take a very long time to go away, or they may not go away. So… [PAUSE AND EXHALE] maybe I'm not ambitious enough, but this has not affected me. But I know people who have been affected and have left in search of… getting what they are worth. Achieving the ceiling of their qualifications. Yes. But maybe not many.

So, continuing with that [referring to Shari'a law being an influence in the constitution and Cedar willing to accept that because it is a part of the culture] –

Shari'a law applies to civil life. Shari' law applies to marriage, burial, inheritance, to uh- it doesn't apply to my being an equal citizen. It doesn't. So they gave us, I mean, in all the Arab countries they give Christians their own ecclesiastical […] laws, you know. We can be married according to the Christian laws and if there is divorce, and inheritance, now. We cannot overrule- I don't know if this- the Shari'a law. Now, the Shari'a law gives the girl half the share of the boy. I cannot in Jordan, or in any Arab country- I don't know whether all of them- ask for a full share. In Israel I can. I have an equal share, like my brother. But Shari' law, the church cannot say, 'we want to change this inheritance law' because you cannot go above the Shari' law. So in this country, for Christians and Muslims, the female- she gets half the share of the brothers. We cannot overrule that. Now there are some families, who, they accept the Shari'a but they give the girl her share. I do that. I mean, nobody can stop me from giving my sons and daughters the same share. I know that my two sons would not take more than their sister's share. And nobody can tell me that I've broken the law. When my husband died, the church gave me… I, as a wife, took 1/8th and the sons take a full share and the daughters take half a share. Now, between us, we can change that! Who can stop me from doing that? Some Christian families take advantage of the Shari'a and deprive the females of their full share, you see? And the female cannot do anything. Now, the people in Jerusalem, you know, although there is East Jerusalem and West Jerusalem but the same

law applies. I know Christian families who have gone to court- which would be an Israeli court- and the daughters have taken the same share as the brothers, against the Shari'a law. See? But before Israel took East Jerusalem in 1967, they couldn't have done that, because the civil courts they would go to **also** apply the Shari'a law on inheritance. So, this is what affects us most. There are other laws, like according to the draft constitution that we read, if an abandoned child was found- and this is very rare, we don't have too many illegitimate children, or children who are abandoned by their parents. I mean, luckily. And this is because of our family ties. This is culture. But there cases. Now, there are mothers who would leave their children on the steps of a church. Now this is an indication that this is a Christian child. There are mothers who would leave their children, if there are illegitimate, with a cross around their neck. Now, this is saying **something**. Now, according to the constitution, **any** child found- an abandoned child, I don't know what the right word is- is automatically a Muslim. Because, again, in the Koran it says- or according to their laws- Islam is the religion of **birth**, of instinct. Every child is born a Muslim. And that is the meaning of Kufar or Kaafir if you are familiar with that name. It means you subdue your being a Muslim and you **stray** to being a Christian or a Jew or whatever. But every child is Muslim. So when a child is found, whether there are signs the child is Christian or not, the child is a Muslim. We were able to change that. Now, we don't yet have a constitution, I mean. But the committee was **very** open to accept this, uh, and I hope in the end- things like that, we've tried. Not only us. There are other Christian **and** Muslim institutions who have tried to change that because they are discriminatory to our values and our Christian principles. I hope they will take them into consideration. What we not succeeded, and that is because the constitution will go to a referendum, is not to have Islam as the religion of the state.

Do you feel that the Palestinian Authority be able to […] effectively [control] those areas of law or one type of law would eventually overpower the others?

(45:35) Yes. This is a complicated question and I cannot foresee the future but when the constitution was being drafted, Hamas was not in power. Fatah was in power and Fatah is much more- it, it is considered a secular organization. It has Christians and Muslims and people who are not, you know- . By law, here, we have to belong to a faith and we have to belong to a denomination. I cannot say that I am not a believer. And in Israel, not only here. But law, you have to belong to a faith and a denomination. So, uh… I forget where I started, where did I start? … I just strayed…

You were just mentioning that Hamas was-

Ah, yes. Now, the United States and Israel were pressuring Fatah and Yassar Arafat to draft a constitution although Israel, after 60 years, still does not have a constitution. [GARBLED RANT] They probably know the problems- [GARBLED RANT]. I will come back this. (46:35) But, they were pressuring us to have a constitution! Imagine that- uh- this is ridiculous that Israel would be pressuring us to have a constitution. So that's why we have so many drafts. And then Hamas came to power, now this has been shelved. Because neither the United States nor Israel want to see a Hamas constitution. Or to see the influence of Hamas in the constitution. So no body talks about the constitution anymore. It was shelved. Now, if Hamas was in charge of the constitution, it would be a different story. It would be a different story. I wouldn't like to see Hamas drafting a constitution. Because they are very Islamic, it would be an Islamic constitution. Maybe they will have an Islamic state- I don't know. Although the people I know from Hamas, they are very well educated people and very tolerant people. They would never think of having a Muslim state like Saudi Arabia, or like Iran- they would not have that. But maybe there will be more Muslim influence in the constitution. So luckily now it has been shelved. We have I think four drafts, four

that have been drafted. But it has been stopped. And hopefully Hamas will just be a passing phenomenon… [INTERRUPTED FOR TEA] And, uh, I believe that Hamas is a passing phenomenon. We all know why Hamas is there, we all know how it was encouraged by the United States and by Israel. I am just reading a book right now that uncovers all the stories of how Hamas and bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, all of them, were agents of the United States when they needed to use them and then they abandoned them. I have always said that Islam is a two edged sword, you know. At one time, they were used [INTERRUPTED FOR TEA] you see. So at some time, the United States was using Muslims to split Fatah or to split those organizations. But now it's turned against them, so it is a two edged sword. But now it differs a great deal whether the constitution is under the influence of a Hamas government or a Fatah government, we hope a Fatah government which is secular. And we Palestinian Christians are very much in favor of a secular state, secular democratic state and a secular democratic constitution. That would be best. And you know, in Islam there is this protection, and uh- the Dhimma, I don't know whether you are familiar with that- that non-Muslims, whether they are Jews or Christians, that they are under the protection of Islam. They think that this is- that they are doing us a favor. And that the prophet said anybody that harms a Christian or a Jew harms **me**. And they think that this is protection enough. Now, it may be, but for me it's not enough because I don't want to be a protected person I want to be protected by the law and the constitution and equal. I don't need to be under the protection and under the wing of anybody. So will reject that and will fight against that and I hope it would not happen and there's a little bit of fear that if it's a Hamas influence government that this will stay and people will have to pay protection money. You know, in olden times, non-Muslims have to pay protection money. But it's no better in a Jewish state! […] In a Jewish state, everybody who is a non-Jew is not a full citizen- is not a national of the state. So Israel complains and it always says that a Muslim state is bad, but also a Jewish state is bad. So if I resent a Muslim state- I also resent a Jewish state. And that's what Israel is. It's a state for Jews, and it's a Jewish state. And it's laws are discriminatory. And that's why they don't have a constitution. Because if they put all those basic laws that we have now in a constitution, it would be scandalous, the way they discriminate against non-Jews because it's a Jewish state. When I was growing up- when Ben Gurion, when David Ben Gurion declared the state the night between the 14th and 15th of May of 1948- he declared it a Jewish state. And we said [GASP] what is that going to mean for us? And until this day we are discovering what it means for us, and it is very, very discriminatory. The **gap** between what is [due] to a national and what is [due] to a mere citizen of the state is enormous. And people don't know- they say you are citizens, you vote, what are you complaining about? Let them come and see.

So the danger, the threat, is the religious state?

Yes. I don't want the Christian state; I don't want to have to live in a Christian state. So a religious state, we don't like.

[…] Would you be against the creation of a Christian political party to counter Hamas?

Never, never, never, never. Never. First of all, because I am not… [PAUSE] We are divided into our political parties, according to what we believe. I don't belong to any party. I just believe in peace, I believe in Israel remaining there- it's now a fact, whether I like it or not. For the sake of peace I'm willing to recognize Israel and to live in peace with Israel, so I don't belong to any political party. But I want our political parties to include both Christians and Muslims. I am not against political parties. This is democracy, you see. So I am very much against a Christian party, first of all, as a matter of principle. Second of all, it will only create a counter, you know- it will, it will, attract antagonism and create… So it's bad in every way… And I believe one of our safe guards is our weakness. We are so small in number, we are so weak, we are not a threat to

anybody. It's not nice to say this, but it is a fact that this safeguards us. If we were in Lebanon, it is almost equal. That's why they are fighting all the time and the problems in Lebanon [DEEP BREATH] keep coming up every now and then and it might lead to civil war because the Christians are **as** powerful as the Muslims. I don't know, now, there is a debate about the numbers and who is the majority and probably the Muslims are the majority. They are both **armed** […] I am very, very happy this is not the case here. I would like our numbers to increase, but I don't want arms. I don't want this polarization between Christians and Muslims. This would be- this would drive me out. If this would happen, it's the **only** thing that would encourage me and my family to leave the country. So it's very bad in everyway.

[…] If we could talk about the Separation Wall, and how that has been affecting you and your community […] How has the Separation Wall affected your community?

I live in the north part of Jerusalem, close to the Kalandiya checkpoint, which is considered part of Israel although it is occupied Palestinian territory. Very soon next to us, right next to us, there is going to be what Israel is calling the largest neighborhood in Jerusalem. I call it the largest settlement on the West Bank. Which is the fact, because it is across the Green Line, it is in the West Bank. I live in the West Bank but this part has been annexed to Jerusalem. The wall runs right through the middle of the road. This is the main road [DRAWING LINES WITH HANDS] between Ramallah and Jerusalem, this is the main road. The right side of the road, the right side, the left side. The wall runs in the middle. Now, it separated our neighborhood from **our neighborhood**. It separated Palestinians from Palestinians. There is a school on my side of the road. Children from this side of the road cannot come to school anymore. The mothers- it's from kindergarten to the secondary level. There were mothers that used to cross the road and bring their kids to school […] because they have to cross the road and it's a busy road. Now they have to go to Kalandiya, backward, cross the checkpoint, be searched, those who don't have permits or the blue ID cards, are turned back. Other can come, you know, they take a bus- those are poor people, mostly, there are rich people. They take the bus, then get off, they walk on foot across Kalandiya, then they walk on the other side, they ride the bus on the other side, come and take their children. This takes them half the day! They bring their children to school in the morning and come collect them at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. So they can keep it up for one year, for two years just in defiance. But how long can they keep it up? How long can they keep it up? They can't stay on this side with their children so wait for them to leave. So they have to go **all** the way back, do their housework, their cooking, whatever- their shopping- and then come back when the school is out to get their children. They used to cross the street and bring their children. I used to shop on the other side. My butcher, my green grocer- my grocer is on the other side. I had to leave them- why? All the facilities- it was one neighborhood! Now it is divided in two. This is one thing. Now, my neighbor, I live in an apartment building that I pay rent for and the landlord and his wife live just below me. They've been married for 11 years- a young couple. They have 2 kids and yesterday she gave birth to the third. They have 3 boys. Now she's from Ramallah and he's from Jerusalem. For 11 years they've been applying for family reunification. For the women, for the wife, to live **legally** with her husband. They've been married for 11 years, and she still can't- sometimes they get a permit for residency in Jerusalem. You know, they give her a 3 month permit, then she has to wait 15 days without a permit, which means she can't leave her home! And even with a permit she can't drive her car- she has a car- because the permit only allows her to stay in Jerusalem for that time. Now she cannot drive her car and she cannot drive in the car with [her husband]. He cannot take her as a passenger because he's a Jerusalemite and she's a West Banker. So, even her posture has changed! Every time the doorbell rings she shrinks. It might be **them**, coming to check whether there are illegal people living in this house or not, you see? This is one of **thousands** of cases

where the man is a Jerusalemite or an Israeli and the women from the West Bank or the other way around. Now, according to the new law that is extended every 6 months- or maybe every year, I don't know- that, you know, person that marries someone from the West Bank it's the Palestinian side that takes the other side […] Because they want to get rid of as many Palestinians as possible because of the demography problem, because it's a Jewish state, you know, it all goes back to the same thing! So the laws, the nationality laws, are affecting us. The checkpoints are affecting us in **everyway**! We have a young man working here who comes from Jerusalem- from Ramallah, I mean- he carries a Jerusalem ID. And Jerusalem goes into Ramallah, there are neighborhoods in Ramallah that are, you know, within the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem. This young man has stories to tell everyday when he comes in. Yesterday he said that… He arrives late everyday cause he has to check- and he looks very Palestinian and he's one of the very suspicious people, you know, because he's a young Palestinian man. And yesterday he says, 'yesterday, you know, they had signs. They had papers- A4 paper, just that big [HOLDS UP FINGERS]- something written on it. And many people- people don't go and read those papers. They were struck somewhere. And he went over and read what was in them and it said that people who have land on this side of Kalandiyya checkpoint and on this side that- this was a notice that their lands had been confiscated. Just you know this little piece of paper that no one care's to read. Which means they have put up a notice and after, I don't know, 15 days- I don't know how many days- they will say, 'we warned you we had a notice and nobody complained.' So their land goes. Their land goes towards this big settlement, which is called a neighborhood of Jerusalem that's being established now next door to me. And the purpose of this, I mean I read this in their papers [in Harretz], the purpose of this is settlement is to cut Ramallah from Jerusalem **completely**. With one gate, which is the Kalandiya gate. So it's not how it is affecting our lives. You can ask, 'how can you live? How do you still live?' It's an impossible situation. Now, it does drive people out, who can. People who have money to leave. People who have, who are educated and can find a job outside. People who can find a host country to accept them. People who have relatives outside- . How **long** can you put up with this no-life? It's not a life, it's a non-life. Especially the young. Especially the young. So they're making life **so** impossible, that really it's amazing how some people can put up with it day after day after- . But it is survival. There is only one word for it- survival. And determination. It's amazing the resilience, the determination of the Palestinian people- it's a phenomenon! It is amazing. And no other people in the world- I'm not sure about, but, I'm saying- to me it looks like… How can we? How much longer can we put up with this? I don't have to cross Kalandiya everyday. My daughter does. But my daughter is the one- because she teaches in Ramallah. But she has the blue ID, the blue ID card. And others are not as lucky. And they cannot get the permits anytime they want. Besides the total closures. Besides the partial closures. Besides the standing in [lines]- besides the **humiliation**! The daily humiliation. Security is one thing, humiliating the people is another. We are a proud people. We are a proud people. And we don't allow ourselves to be humiliated, so we try to philosophize it. Like 'nobody can dehumanize me. Nobody can humiliate me. I am proud.' You know, 'they try to put me down, but inside I am standing up and I am a proud person.' So we find techniques, we find ways, like we found liberation theology to continue living with dignity and as human beings like the rest of the world. So in every way the walls destruct people's lives. And, let me just say, from my balcony, from my… apartment **everyday** I see the army patrols catching people because I live close to the wall. I can see the wall surrounding us. We live in an enclave. Like this [DRAWING WITH HANDS] like this. The wall goes- you can see it from this side, going right down the middle of the road- and from my balcony I can see it going down the other side. So we are living in an enclave. Now, there is a village. You know, this village, the people went to court and recently it was decided that- Beit Nabala is the name of the village- it will be outside the wall. It was just haphazardly, like that. So the people

here, they have connections in Jerusalem. They need to come. Whether for medical reasons, for school, for government offices, to pray, to go the mosque. For so many reasons they have to come to Jerusalem, they are part of it. They are the environment, the surrounding, the… the suburbs of Jerusalem. Now the wall separated their village. So people, until this day, find ways to- I don't think they climb over the wall- maybe there are parts of the wall that are not complete. But they pass. I see women who **scream** and I look and I find the army pick them up. They take them to prison and they make them pay big fine. And the young people, you know, they come and hide between the houses. You know, when there hear an army jeep- I don't know if they warn each other- they just hide wherever they can hide. This is no life. And if they are caught and they happen to be a young man then [ARMS FALL AND THUMP ON TABLE]… sometimes they are shot. And they say there were ordered to stop and they didn't stop so [GARBLED RANT] so there is always this. They are very easy on the trigger. [HELICOPTER FLYING OVERHEAD]

This is probably an Israeli military helicopter right now?

Yes, yes it could be. It could be for the traffic but, now, if my granddaughter hears this she will run and hide because… [DEEP BREATH]

Because of the fear that permeates from the Occupation?

Because in 2002 we were in Ramallah we they attacked and we lived very close to Yassar Arafat's compound. And we got hit from the air and there were explosions and it was… I don't know how we survived. And they, you know, we fled from our home and they went in and messed it up. They made it headquarters for the army because it overlooked the compound. She was, she was 10 or 11 at the time but she cannot yet get rid of this fear. It has changed her- I hope not permanently. I hope not permanently. But she sometimes writes about- she's 15 now, 15 and a half. She writes and we encourage her to write like 'how I lost my best friend' because her best friend is behind the wall. And 'glass on my bed' because 4 times all the glass in our house was shattered because of the explosions. She writes about it- in English and in Arabic- and we encourage her to do that. She would hide. She would think that I was thick enough to prevent the bullet from, you know. So I would be her protection when those helicopters. They shoot and they send rockets and rockets fell a **few** yards away from us. All the […] the shutters wouldn't shut anymore. And then they broke into our house and they smashed her toys and messed her books and all her clothes. So, I didn't tell you anything personal but the personal stories are much, much more painful than the general. Every one of us has a story. Not every family, every member of every family. It's a story of suffering; it's a story of courage. It's a story of survival; it's a story of **will**. But the lucky ones- and I call myself a lucky one- held onto our faith and I still believe in peace and I still work for peace and I still believe the two- because, you know, in Haifa, there were Jews and Christians and Muslims in our neighborhood. We lived together without any problems before this. So, my memory […] gives me hope for the future that we **can** live together. Now, the divide is growing wider. But I believe that if there is peace, it will very quickly, you know- quicker than it grew- it will come back. We have a lot in common. Maybe more with the, they call them the [Subars]- the Jews that were born in this country- than the European Jews. The European Jews are Europeans. Their lifestyle is different and they are, you know, are **indoctrinated** into the hating- into seeing us as the terrorists, seeing us as the Muslims, seeing us as the enemies of the state of Israel. So it's more difficult to live with Russian Jews, let's say, or with East European Jews. But the Jews of the country we have a lot in common.

[Request to see copies of her grand daughter's writing]

I will give you two pieces, yes. [Describes the writing as simple.]

Transcript
Interview: Nadine Bitar
Wednesday 6 June 2007
Sabeel Jerusalem

Craig: This is Craig Noyes interviewing on Wed. June 6, 2007 at the Sabeel office in Jerusalem. And, just for the record, what is your full name?
Nadine: Nadine Saheel Bitar.

And how old are you?
17.

And where were you born?
In Jerusalem.

Have you lived in Jerusalem your entire life?
Yeah.

How would you identity yourself? If someone asked you, 'who are you?' Would it by religion, by nationality?
I'm Nadine who lives in the Old City. I'm Christian. That's mostly it, I think.

Okay. How many languages do you speak?
English, Arabic… French, and a little Hebrew.

So with the English, Arabic, and the French, [do you have] full proficiency?
No. Just with the Arabic and the English. But the French, like I- I had to take French at school from the first grade to the tenth and, uh… that's it.

The school that you are in right now, is it public or is it private?
Private.

It's a church school?
Yeah. It's a church- uh, and American school.

An American school?
Yeah.

Do you know any friends who go to the public schools?
No.

All private education?
Yeah. Like, like, uh… we have only a few schools that are public. Most of them are private.

So what are you interested in? What subjects do you like?
Um… [LONG PAUSE] language. I love to read books and stuff like that. Literature.

Do you want to go to college?
Oh sure. Yeah.

Do you think you'll continue with the languages there?
No. I'm studying youth ministry.

Youth ministry, okay. So, what do you think […] you want to do with your education?
Um, um… I'm going to America to study and then I'm coming back here to help the people […] because I think we don't have anyone who studied youth ministry and we need it here. In our country.

When you say the people here, are you referring to the Christian population specifically or the Palestinian people as a whole?
Yeah. On the whole.

Out of all your friends, are they mainly Christian friends or do you have a good number of non-Christian friends?
I have only two non-Christian [friends]. But they are, like, real nice. But my Christian school- all of them are all Muslim. Like there are few Christian. The school- even- it's a Christian school but we have more numbers of Muslims. But still, we are living as if we are all Palestinian.

So do the classmates- Christian and Muslim- interact a lot?
We are like best friends, especially my class. Because like, when you do something like it's a secret between us, so. Like, if it's a- uh. When you see in other places, like if you are Christian and Muslim there's like, some, you know that. Like maybe they hate each other and stuff like that, but no. I don't think so. With me. Because, like, we are all Palestinian and we all have the same problem, so we need to solve it together. That's it.

How large is your class?
We're 30… almost like that.

How do you practice Christianity? What denomination is your family?
A Catholic. We are Catholic. And I help a lot with the church and with Sunday schools. And we have the scouts- the Catholic scouts. We do a lot of things for helping old people and children who don't have parents. We go and, like, make them happy. Especially at Christmas and Easter… when we have time.

So you participate in a lot of different groups in your church outside of going to mass?
Yeah.

Do you wish there was something that your church did- like some kind of organization or service they provided- that they don't currently provide?
No, we have everything we need. Especially in the Old City.

Okay. Do you feel that you and your friends, or discussions in your family, talk a lot about the political situation either in the Palestinian Authority or in Israel?
Yeah, sometimes, but not always. But because like, I have a friend who lives in Bethlehem and now he can't come here. And if we have to go we have to go through the checkpoints and they

have to check everything we have and sometimes if you are taking something with you they might keep it until you come back and you take it. Like there is a lot of problems but- I don't know. Maybe one day they will be solved.

Do you feel that the Palestinian Authority could be doing something different to solve the problem?
I don't know [CHUCKLE].

You don't know? Okay.
I don't know a lot of things about the West Bank, like the government. But for my cousins- because they live in Ramallah- they always tell me, uh, whatever they do, the Israelis do the opposite thing. So if they want peace, the Israelis- they say they want peace. But after like three hours, after what they said, they will go into Gaza and kill people so there is… they don't do what they say. So I don't think they'll be a solution because the two parts, they aren't listening to each other.

So do you think it's important that people start talking on both sides, especially if they're not in the government? Would you think it would help if there was constant communication between Palestinian citizens and Israeli citizens?
Yeah. Yeah, like, my church last year. We had to go to Italy. Uh, Christian, Muslims, and Jew. So we all went together and it's like- it was a peace trip. And we talked a lot about what happened here. And most of the Israeli people, they don't know what happened in the West Bank and how do they kill the children. And like you can see there are a lot of Israeli people who are against what their government is doing and they are with the Palestinian people.

Do you wish that […] there were organizations where you could go [and talk with the Israeli citizens] … [cited the Catholic scouts].
Yeah, we did that once.

What is your opinion of Hamas coming to power?
I don't like it.

You don't like it, okay. Why?
Because of, like, strict for things that they're not supposed to be strict and they- . Like, the conflict now between Fatah and Hamas, they are just killing each other. They are both Palestinian. They are just killing each other, instead of defending their country. They are just killing each other. And killing, uh, little people and young people.

Do you think that, if Hamas stays in power, that it could eventually threaten the Christian population in Palestine?
Yeah.

Yeah? Do you think that that's one of their motives or that's just a development that would happen?
Uh, I don't know because I, I don't have friends that are Hamas. But, but all the people say that Hamas wants to be only a Muslim country and they don't want Christians to be in it.

Have you ever […] felt that you have either been discriminated against or you felt hurt by a Muslim because they knew you were Christian?

Yeah. We live it. Like, when you go in the Old City… If you are Christian, they'll be like, 'oh they are non-believers.' And that, 'they don't know God,' and 'they have to be Muslims so they could go to heaven.' And they'll be cursing at you when you are cross or anything that shows you are Christian.

Does that happen a lot?

Yeah… Like the people, they are not educated. Like, they are just… you call it, homeless and stuff like that.

Do you feel like there are a lot of those people?

Uh, we used to have a lot but now, I don't think so […] because I think they are living the problem, now. Because, like, if they see a girl that she doesn't have a scarf on her head, they'll be like, 'she's a Christian' so we have to curse are her- do stuff like that. But we have Muslim girls that don't put scarves on their head. So now, they're like, 'maybe she's Muslim, maybe she's a Christian' so they don't do that a lot.

Okay, so since the Muslim population is changing a little bit, it's harder to determine if you are Christian? But if they know you are Christian- ?

Yeah, they will.

Okay. But that's- just like you said- just the uneducated and the homeless?

Yeah. Yeah.

Have you are any of your friends- other than have names called at you or cursing you- ever been physically intimidated or hurt by them?

My friend once, yes.

Do you mind telling me what happened?

They followed her and they wanted to do something to her. But she's like- strong. [GRIN].

She's strong?

Yeah. [LAUGHTER] We have to be strong in this country. For both- for both. Even if she was a Muslim or a Jew or even a Christian. Because there is bad from both sides. Like there is Christian- that he's bad. And there's a Muslim- that he's bad. And there's good and good- on both sides. So- .

Yeah, so they're definitely good. There are just pockets of people who are…?

Yeah.

Okay. So do you feel uncomfortable wearing a cross or- ?

No.

No? Okay.

I am proud of it. [SMALL SMILE]

You're proud of it, okay. Even when the people are yelling at you, you're standing tall–

Yeah.

[…] Okay… Do you know anybody- either friends or family- who emigrated, who left, the area because they felt that they had better opportunities somewhere else?

Yeah. My uncles.

Do you know where they moved to?

America. They are all in Chicago. Three uncles and one aunt. But uh- my uncles, they went before and my aunt- . My new uncle when- I think- two years ago.

Do you know why they left?

No. But my uncle went because there is no work here. He used to work in a place and now they closed it. But there is a lot more [jobs] in America and she could live there better.

Do they ever plan- or do they ever want- to come back and visit?

Yeah. At summer. My aunt just left before three days. She came. And my uncle too.

Do you know if they're happy in Chicago?

Yeah, I think they are. [END OF TRACK 5]

[INTERVIEW PAUSED SO SABEEL MEETING COULD BE OBSERVED]

How much are you affected by the Separation Wall as well as the Israeli checkpoints?

In the Old City? No, we don't have checkpoints in the Old City. But if you want to go outside the Old City you have face the checkpoints and the Wall. Especially when you go to Bethlehem and Ramallah.

So how often do you, personally, pass through the checkpoints?

Um… not everyday. Like, once a week. But if you have to go to a place that is farther than Jerusalem you have to pass through them.

How are you treated by the Israeli soldiers when you pass through the checkpoints? Could you explain to me how a normal passage would go?

If you want to pass it, you have to- . First, you have to- it's like if you go to an airport- it's the same as an airport. You have to pass through a machine. If you have guns or anything like that, it would ring. And you have to prepare your ID- your Israeli ID. You can't pass without and Israeli ID. And they have to check everything you have. In your bag, in you pocket. **Everything**, everything. And sometimes they have rooms- special rooms- for the guys and the girls. They take them inside the room and if she's a girl, a soldier girl will search all of her body. And the guys- guys. And if you have a small metal thing they will take it away and they will take you… and uh- .

What, you mean arrest you?

Yeah. For, like, a day or less. They need a small thing just to take you with them. Especially on the Bethlehem checkpoint.

Do you have friends in Bethlehem that you aren't able to see because of the long checkpoints?

Yeah. [GRIN] My boyfriend.

Oh, okay… I'm sorry to hear that.
It's okay.

How does it affect his life? What is his emotional response to it? Do you feel that there is an increase in frustration or anger?
Yeah, he is angry, because like he can't come. I always go, but he can't come. But sometimes they give him a paper that he could come to Jerusalem. Especially on Christmas and Easter. Like, they give, uh… Israel is trying to make a difference between Christian and Muslim. Like at the checkpoint, if they see on your ID you are Christian they will let you pass. If you are a Muslim they let you stop and they will search you. And, uh, they give the papers on that point. If you are Christian, most of the time they will give. But Muslims, not very much.

Within the Occupied Territories and where the Palestinian Authority [has jurisdiction], do you feel that the government or the police try to make a difference between Christian and Muslims?
No.

So it's still [contained], like you said, to the uneducated or the homeless population?
Yeah.

Okay. Do you remember at all, during the Second Intifada- it was actually in April of 2002- when Palestinian fighter were held up in the Church of the Nativity?
Yeah.

Were you affected by it?
Yeah. Yeah.

What did you think about that?
About them in the Church of the Nativity?

Uh huh.
[LONG PAUSE] I think that they went to it for- to be protected from the soldiers. And that affected all the people who lived in Bethlehem, not only the people inside the church. Like they had- people, they had to stay inside their homes for 40 days and they don't have bread and nothing. They had nothing. And they had to stay there. And after 40 days they let them go out from 7 until 5 just to get their food and come back home. Uh… I don't know, I think they- it had a big effect on the people in Bethlehem.

Do you think it was wrong for the fighters to go in the church?
No.

Do you think it was wrong of the Israeli forces to hold them and not let them leave the church?
Yeah.

[…] You said you wanted to be educated in the United States…
Because we don't have youth ministry here.

Do you think want to stay there or do you definitely want to return?

No way. [LAUGHTER] I went to America twice. And it's good just to visit but not to live there. I don't think that it's… it's not my way to live… in America.

What do you think, in the United States, is wrong for you?

The United States is not wrong but its government is a little bit wrong.

Transcript
Interview: Omar Haramy
Wednesday 6 June 2007
Sabeel Jerusalem

Craig: This is Craig Noyes interviewing on Wed. June 6, 2007 at the Sabeel office in Jerusalem. And, just for the record, what is your full name?

Omar: My name is Omar Haramy.

And how old are you?

27.

And where were you born?

In Jerusalem.

Have you lived in Jerusalem your entire life?

Except for the six years of education. I studied at the American University in Athens, Greece. Finished my bachelors and my masters degree there.

Congratulations.

Thank you.

What did you study and what did you earn your degrees in?

I did my B.E. in Business Administration with a finance concentration. And my masters degree is in M.B.A. with emphasis in telecommunication.

What are you interested in doing with your education, with those degrees?

I was hoping to go into the telecommunication field. But since it's… I mean, living in this part of the world, it's not a big market to go in. I worked at al-Quds University the first year I came back. Then I became more interested in- I was more secular Christian and I became more interested- I was always interested in justice issues but from a secular point of view. The last two years changed my life- different incidences in Jerusalem- there was an opening at Sabeel, I quite my previous job, which was better career wise and better money wise, too. And I came to Sabeel.

How many languages do you speak?

Arabic, English, and communicational Greek.

All fluently?

No. Arabic and English fluently. Or at least, I hope so. [CHUCKLE] Uh, Greek is only… I can just barely communicate in Greek.

When you did your elementary and secondary education here in Jerusalem, was it a public or a private school?

Uh, I studied- I mean, Ramallah used to be- before the First Intifada- it used to be just a ten minute drive from Jerusalem. So I studied at Friend's boy's school in Ramallah, it's a Quaker school. And an American high school, Quaker school. So this is where I finished my elementary school, until high school.

Why was the private school route chosen?

Uh… I mean, living under occupation and public schools were under the government. And since we have no government and it's only a military- very few importance is given to education. Internation- uh… private schools, they give a better education. Most Palestinians who can afford private school, we go to private school.

Was there anything particular within the public school curriculum that was negative? […]

I mean, I wouldn't say negative because I finished the same curriculum that we had in the private schools and the public schools- we have the same curriculum. However, in private schools you have an alternative. You are able to apply for the SATs or… or GCE, the British system. Or IB, different systems. And public schools you can only apply for, uh… the Palestinian, or **Jordanian**, uh, exams. Which all of us do, even though we apply- we do the SATs and we get good scores […] we also do this to finish our education.

Do you feel that there is anything particular within the public school curriculum that is disadvantageous for Christians, specifically? Or, targeted more at Muslims than Christians?

Uh… not- no. Not really. Cause, I mean, in the Jordanian curriculum **and** Palestinian curriculum- cause when I studied we did not have Palestinian Authority. So we did not have a Palestinian curriculum, we had the Jordanian curriculum… which was for 10 years. There is nothing. I mean, we never felt- even in the books when they were referring to Christians and inter-faith relations and stories, I mean it was, uh… they used the right phrases from the Koran or there was no- at that time there was no proper presentation for the **Christian** faith. However, it is different. Now, when the Palestinian Authority came. They have reduced special exams, special courses in schools mandatory to faith, for Christians. We were not, we did not- at that time, when we did not have the Jordanian curriculum, it wasn't […] mandatory to go and attend Muslim classrooms. At that time the Christians either, they did a single Bible study of their own. Because there is a small minority, we lack Christian teachers. And most of the Christian teachers, even in the private schools they are… uh, they are, uh… some of them- most of them are missionaries. So I mean, it's- and the priests in the villages or the areas where there are Christians, they are… I mean, over-burdened with their own work. [So] they would leave it for Sunday school. No problems at all, we have never felt it.

In your opinion, what is the most important job that must be accomplished by the Palestinian Authority at this time?

(7:02) It is, I mean, just to… it's difficult. I mean, I'm not going to say the most difficult job- I mean, the most important job- because they are crippled. They can not do anything. There is nothing that I can demand of them. It's a sick authority that has no power to do anything. There are no security [INTERRUPTED BY CELL PHONE RING]- I'm sorry. There are no security forces to implement security. They don't have money for the last 10 months, they haven't paid salaries. There isn't anything we can ask of them. I mean, the most important thing that we need… is… [LONG PAUSE] I don't know. As I said, there is nothing we can ask. Ask the Authority what we need from the **international** community or, uh… Of course, because we are living under occupation, according to the United Nations… uh… According to the United Nations, and it is very clear here in East Jerusalem [but] asking the world community to **end** the Occupation so that we could be able to be free to start building or rebuilding our country and our societies.

Do you feel that Christian participation within the Palestinian Authority is sufficient?

I think it is us, the Palestinians. I mean, we are Palestinian Christians. We are less than one percent- we are 1.5%. In Palestine. In historical Palestine. However, Palestinians among all the Palestinians, we are around 12%. For example, my family- my family, my extended family, out of like three hundred people, there is only ten still living here. I mean, there is more Palestinian Christians from Ramallah living in Florida than Ramallah, now. South America more Christians from Bethlehem and Beit Jala and Beit Sahour than they are already living here. South America, like Chile- by itself. We are represented in Palestinian Legislative Council, which is like to Parliament, **more** than… to the fair range that reflects [Palestinian] Christians all around the world. So we get fair, fair… even **more** than fair representation in Parliaments and governments. So we don't fear that we are isolated and excluded. [PAUSE TO CHANGE VIDEO TAPE] […] So they do not complain. Although now there has been- with the concept of democracy becoming more accepted around the world- people are saying, 'this is not fair. Christian voices and Muslim voices, that to have quotas, it is not the right thing to do.'

Your view of the necessary government in Palestine is much more secular than it currently is?

… Sorry?

You feel that the government should be more secular? You feel that the quotas by religion or the participation of political parties based on religion is not healthy for the Palestinian people?

I mean, it is a very controversial issue. I can not say, I mean… historically […] I don't know. It's a subject of debate. I might think that the quotas are wrong and I might also think that the quotas are right. I mean, they ensure our representation in the country. But I mean, this is a lot, being 1%. And ask the Christians, sometimes, we go into this problem. We are less than 1% of the community, but we want 50% part of share of the community. And this is not always right. We should have equal rights, Christians and Muslims. But we shouldn't become a way that we are abusing being a minority.

Do you feel that without the quotas the Christian voice would be silenced?

I mean… the Christians, we are 1%. Yes, we are very small in number. However, we are very productive and we are very- we are always on the surface in the community. We are always the leaders in building hospitals. We get, uh… the best jobs, maybe, or we are always present. So we do lots of work- more than… our work does not reflect our percentage in the community. We do lots of work. Many authors, many artists. I mean, the biggest youth organizations and everything, they are all Christian. And they do lots of work, and this reflects the image of Christianity… I'm sorry, I lost a little bit.

It's fine. Do you find that the activity and the visibility of the Christian population […] creates a risk for any kind of intimidation or backlash from non-Christian communities?

We have never felt it. I mean, I lived in a neighborhood- I was the only Christian. Maybe there was another family, but as children, we were the only Christians. We never felt this. We never felt we were discriminated against. But sometimes, you know, as children we didn't understand- I mean, being kinds and everything- we didn't understand why they go to a mosque and we go to a church. It was a little bit- . I mean, it wasn't the center of our childhood. It wasn't a trauma in our childhood, or anything. They came to our house. My mother doesn't wear a veil. She is a Christian, she wears a cross. Our neighbors- some of them- the Muslims wore the veil. It was just a little bit different. But more or less, like the 5%, we were similar. 5%. This was different. It is like we are different, Christians [from] different denominations. I mean, I know, for example, my

friend… she is a Baptist. When she worships, it is completely different from the way I worship in the Orthodox Church. The Greek Orthodox Church, she finds it a little bit different. The Greek Orthodox Church. So I mean, we are also different- Christians, among ourselves. There are thirty different churches. But never felt that we were discriminated against. Never felt had any problems and all my best friends are Muslims. I've never felt that- . Always, the problems since my childhood, the trauma in my life and in my brothers' life, it is from Israelis, from the Occupation. Being called Christian and Muslim, we never heard it in our childhood. This is a new phrase after September 11th, mainly, and with the growth of Muslim fundamentalism with what's happening in the world. I mean, it's a Western… 'the clash of civilizations.' These are new terms for us, we've never heard about them. And they are being marketed in our country. Of course, you can not generalize that all Muslims are angels. Some people- it's 99% and there's 1%. It only takes 1% of the Muslims to be of equal size of us. But in general, we do not [GARBLED] with the wide majority of Muslims. Also, you can not say that Christians are all angels. I mean, Palestinians with a Christian identity, or Palestinians with a Muslim identity, you can not say that we are all angels. We are humans, I mean.

Have you are anyone you know […] been affected by the influence of Islamic fundamentalism, specifically in the growing influence of Hamas?

I mean, the elections showed that 60% of the Palestinian population voted for Hamas. It means that one out of- more than one- two out of every three you walk through the street- they voted for Hamas. Yes, it is clear now, in this decade or in the last two decades, Palestinians have moved- Muslim Palestinians- have moved towards Islam and [the] Muslim right more than the past. And they are being more- and so you can say the same thing with the Christians. And Europe, they are also moving to the right, to the Christian right. […] Affected? Many of my classmates, they were Muslim… uh… Muslim students and they… I would say that they were in support of such movements, of Hamas and student movements… as I say, it's two out of three you walk past in the streets. So it's the whole Palestinian people. I also know Christians who voted for Hamas.

Do you feel most of the people voted for Hamas because of the religious base or because of the social benefit structure of the party?

It's a mixture of things. It was, first, the corruption that was in the Fatah movement. This is one. I mean, this is one part of the story. Another part is Hamas has been active, that they are honest people. They do not cheat. And they really work hard for the benefit of the community. Disagreeing with their methods, I mean… another factor is that, it was- the Palestinians. It is very difficult, maybe, for you to understand this, coming from the West. It is very difficult for someone to be living all his life- twenty four hours a day, seven days a week- for everyday of the life, everyday of the year, in humiliation. […] The propaganda [says] that the humiliation is coming from Israel and from the United States. It's built so much distress on us, the Palestinians. And some people thought that voting for Hamas, it will upset Israel and the United States. The United States, it seems they're making an oil campaign, don't worry about it. People don't like what the United States is doing in Iraq. Everybody believes that what the United States is doing in Iraq has made life **much** more difficult for Iraqis. I have many Iraqi Christians who have been living for **thousands** of years in Iraq… They became immigrants. They had their farm and everything. [Then] they ran away from American bombs. And now they ran away because Bush portrayed it- the war's between Crusaders and Muslims. And you have some people- immigrants- who would think it's Crusaders and Muslims- that us, the **Christians**- have become Crusaders. Some people, they are ignorant, they fall into this trap. So, uh… it is more, I mean- I think it's just to do what the

States told us not to do. Do work for Hamas people just don't accept the States, accept Bush. This is our way of fighting back.

What is your personal opinion of Hamas and their basis in the Islamic faith?

I mean it's, uh… As I ask people not to interfere with my Christian faith I won't interfere or tell a person what to do with someone else's faith. I might sit and exchange some arguments or whatever, but I will not interfere if they are Muslim. I mean, being Muslim is not being a devil. Muslim, I mean it is… I know many Christian families who are isolated villages that, if it wasn't for their Muslim neighbors, they would have starved. Or I mean that they are elderly people. Being Muslim doesn't mean being bad. However, I mean, being a supporter of Hamas doesn't mean that Hamas has done bad things. Suicide bombings. I disagree with them and I am against them. And Sabeel has a strong stand against suicide bombings. Those things do not reflect my faith, don't reflect the morality of the Palestinian culture, we are against these things. And thanks to God, Palestinians- we have started a big campaign about it. It is not the Wall that has stopped it. It is education and going to people and saying, 'suicide bombing, violence doesn't pay off.' But especially suicide bombings, because Hamas became popular- uh… became **known** because of the suicide bombings. But Hamas has also done- not everyone voted for Hamas because of the suicide bombing. People voted for the community work and for their honesty… It's, I mean, uh. I go against violence as a Christian, as a Palestinian, and as a human. As I am against Israeli occupation, against wrong things that Israeli does, I am also strict to the Palestinian people that I belong to. Violence and occupation- violence and suicide bombings, kidnapping soldiers, even. We are against this. Although many of this is granted to us. I mean, it is the **right** of an occupied people to resist occupation. This is our right. But I mean, not everything that is with that laws falls with my Christian belief.

Would you say that you disagree with the principle of political parties being based on religion? Do you feel that it would be more beneficial if there were more secular parties within the Palestinian Authority?

There are. I mean, there are. Out of the numbers, there are only two Muslim based parties. The rest of either secular or even… uh… leftist parties. In the numbers, there are maybe twenty Palestinian parties that are leftist or secular and there are only two that are religious. I think it is the key, just to ensure. I mean, it doesn't really… I mean, what is the most important thing, in the United States you have the Constitution. We should have a constitution that respects whoever is in power. They should respect and maintain the regulations. I mean, that every country ever human agrees to.

With the different drafts of the Palestinian constitution, what are your thoughts about Shari'a law as one of the bases of law within the PA?

It was not one- I mean, you could say many bases of the constitution. However, the constitution also is not entirely based on Shari'a law. But although mainly on the Shari'a law. And many Muslims stood against it, **for** the Christians. And they signed petitions and they have changed it, a lot. And we can only do this through time. I mean, if it's Shari'a law or different […] there are some things in Shari'a law that are not acceptable. There are certain things that are [that] we don't mind. And this goes with lobbying and […] we haven't even had our country, our state. Israel has existed for sixty years and they don't have a constitution. We are being asked to draft a constitution before even **having** a country. How can you write a constitution when you don't have proper schools and proper hospitals and proper… How can you educate people to write, uh… to write a constitution that is [well] constructed? It is how many years, uh… slavery was legal in the States.

It took some time and it look **lots** of people to fight against it and lots of lives were lost, to end! And after even it was unconstitutional- slavery- it took really much more time to establish civil rights. And to make people accept and sit in the same seats on the bus or to eat in the same restaurant. This woman that took many decades in the United States- and you had a country. People are asking it from Palestinians before even we **have** a country or something. Those are all excuses, in my opinion, to delay giving us our rights. Of course, if you are sitting in the United States and a superpower you can affect the politics by your vote and say yes- the Israelis have the right to say they have no constitution. Let's let them change their constitution, let them do this, let them do that- you would agree with [this]. But they want us to be living in a utopia when we are living in Hell. To act is if everything is a utopia, those people- it needs much therapy. It needs much schools. We need counselors in the schools to get all of the education and to start respecting human life. I mean, it's- for me- it's a miracle has only been that much from the Palestinian people. I was beaten, for example, going to school. I was beaten almost everyday. From second grade to seventh grade. Me and my brother, almost everyday.

By-

By the Israeli army. So, I mean, imagine putting somebody. I mean, it's thanks to God I am still, I have… but being beaten **everyday**, it's so difficult to wake up in the morning and know that on the way to school you will get beaten, and on the way back you will get beaten. It's very difficult to sit next to your female classmates and they are crying because they were **harassed** by Israeli soldiers. This is **not easy**, to live and, and… I have anger against- I try not to, to, to… to place my anger on Israel or the Israeli people. I place my anger on the Occupation because I know there are many Israelis who are working for justice and peace. So many organizations, they do amazing work. There's so many Jews from their faith, working to end the Occupation, because they know this is something that shouldn't [occur]. Many Christians and many Muslims are doing the same thing. And many seculars, also, are doing the same thing. There are many people working on it. And if I was a force, I would rather be a positive force.

What events from two years ago, which you mentioned earlier, changed your course in your career?

Yes, I don't know if you are aware in 2004- three years, actually- there was a leak in the newspapers that the Greek Orthodox patriarchy, in Jerusalem, has leaked some lands to Jewish settlers in the Old City. Important pieces of land. A number of adults- Christian, ecumenical from different faiths- we met. We had interest in trying to- I don't know if it's the right word- **fix** the church or we had, also, political views. Of course we are against the leak of church property to Zionist, racist, Jewish organizations that don't allow even Arabs to walk through their places or anything. So we started doing [several] demonstrations and everything, because of the problem of us, as Christians. It is very difficult reading the Bible, the Old Testament. Us, the Palestinians, we never felt we had a place in the Bible. You know, it's like when you see a movie and there is good people and there is bad people. No body feels pity for the bad people because you need this to make a story. But it's very difficult being the bad people in the story. Of the people who are on the other side of the sea, of the people who are trying to- as Palestinians- and saying this is the land of Israel but I know my family has been here for two thousand years. How can I come and be kicked out of my house? And to know that my grandmother has suffered and everything. I say, 'this is God's wish, this is God's wish.' So most of us who were conscious about justice, we didn't have a Christian base. We were more secular or leftist. Uh… politically oriented more to the left or secular. We didn't find comfort in our religion. This is the truth. I was one of the people who was asking my classmates to boycott Christian [GARBLED] because I didn't believe in this. So when the problem started with the church- . Until twenty five years old- twenty six- twenty four years

old- twenty three- twenty four years old, maybe, I didn't read the Bible. Knowing I had one Bible study a week, but I ditched. I didn't read, I don't know. And at that time we were started- we became very active. Pretty much popular. We were a bunch of thirty young guys doing lots of demonstrations- I got arrested three times, uh… We reached a movement where we were also arguing with the priests. And the priests were going and reciting things from the Bible and none of us had ever read the Bible, so I asked a friend of mine who was studying- trying to become a minister- for a Bible in Arabic- I still have this at my house. And he gave me the Bible and one day I started reading. I read through Mark- I mean John- and Matthew all of the four Gospels. And it was so easy and it made sense for me. And it was- I don't know… things just got stuck in my head. We started using some of the things that were written in the Gospels, reciting Jesus when we made banners and everything, and it worked with the priests. And I kept reading more and more and more, it by the help of the Holy Spirit as I say, it's a miracle. The first time in history that the patriarch was removed and there was a new patriarchy. And for time in history, it was due to the pressure of the masses and the people and maybe our work because we motivated people. And I started reading it and I started **building** a Christian faith. I always had a Christian identity and I was proud I am a Palestinian and I am a Christian, too. Always, we say it and we scream it- we are proud of our identity. It is part of our culture, although not really a good Christian, at least. By far not a good Christian, but I would always say I am a Christian. **Everybody** who has parents who are Christian would say, 'I am Christian." And be very strict. I am very proud of the identity, although the Bible never mentioned a church. And by so much interest, I got… by mistake, an e-mail from Sabeel, that was circulated among a small circle about there [being] a job opening at Sabeel. Immediately I applied. There were two openings. I came to Sabeel and said I was willing to take both openings under one salary. It was maybe 40% less than my job. I was being promised a raise at my other job and it would have been much better for my career and my future and more towards my discipline. I mean, I was working with big auditors and everything. I came to do the [GARBLED] of Sabeel. That's something I feel I've been commissioned for it. I'm very proud that I have the honor to serve within Sabeel.

(25:35) [Talking about higher rate of Christian emigration from Palestine than Muslims] What do you think accounts for this?

I wouldn't say as much- as high as that. I mean, almost the same of the Muslims are [GARBLED]. It reflects on the Christians more towards the people. The only problem is that, if I would go to the States it's much easier for me to dissolve in the States, being a Christian. I could marry a Christian. And my children would become like my aunt, she married an American. Her kids don't speak Arabic. Deena and Zanah, although they have Arabic names, they have dissolved within the American community. Muslims, they go to the States and they either marry Muslims- Arab Muslims - and they will most likely come back to their country. So their emigration isn't actually emigration because they go work and come back to their country. Christians go into the West and 90%, they disappear. Like example, the director of Sabeel- Naim, Reverend Naim- two sons and a daughter. Both- all three of them married internationals. None of their kids most likely will speak Arabic and they will dissolve into the community. And there's the story- my cousins- the same story. So we dissolve. We do not comeback.

Do you think that this emigration will continue and that eventually most, if not all, the Christian population will have left Palestine?

[CHUCKLE] I mean this is, uh, a little bit funny. Because you are looking like 10 gallons of water and it's dropping and there are seven drops left in the gallon and you are saying, 'you know, if this continues, these seven drops will not- .' I mean, it's as if what has already happened is not a

big disaster. It is a big disaster. But you see the seven drops and now we are worried about the seven drops because they are the last seven drops. I mean, as we say- and maybe you have heard it from my colleagues earlier- we are much more than twelve disciples. I mean, it's not the numbers that make the difference. It has never been like this in history. The problem is if we, as Christians, we have been here to witness the Resurrection. If I have said, 'you have see the Resurrection,' [it is because] you have read it from the Bible. I have heard about the Resurrection because somebody has told my grandfather and my great great grandfather and his grandfather. […] And this is how I heard about the Resurrection. Most likely have not been told- have witnessed it. [We've] seen the sky- and the clouds come. I mean, so we are the ones who tell the rest that the Resurrection happened, not because of a book or not because somebody told me who came from a boat all the way from Jerusalem. I tell you because I witnessed. And we are keeping this. But if we only witness the Resurrection, we don't witness the injustice that is happening. Really it is not important if we stay or not. Because if we forgot about the Resurrection, then we are not really witnessing the Resurrection. If us, the Christians, we see that because they are Muslims, because the majority are Muslims, they are the ones being tortured by the Occupation, then we are not really being Christians. But if we see the Jews are suffering and we do not say they are suffering, then we are not Christians. We are witnesses, and a witness sees the truth. A good witness. And we, as we witnessed for the Resurrection, we also witness the injustice. And this is what people should- Christians should not, when they come and visit, they should come and should see the truth. Just not take sides of somebody- just sit. I mean, you might a good Christian, it doesn't mean you take the side of the Christians. You might take the side of a Muslim or a Jew or even somebody with no faith. If really the one with the problem, this is your job as a Christian. And this is what spread Christianity- witnessing and people saying what they have seen. Saying the truth, not the story that really best fits into their way of thinking. Or it might affect how people think.

Could you explain to us how you are affected by the Separation Wall and the checkpoints?

I mean, you traveled- did you get through the airport security?

Yes.

Was it easy?

Um- [CHUCKLE] to be honest, it was easier at Ben Gurion, but we had a layover in Rome. And Claire and I were interrogated pretty intensely for about 45 minutes […] because they suspected that we had malicious intent for coming to Israel.

Just to make it more, since you had this 45 minutes- this is, I mean, it's not Ben Gurion. Ben Gurion has a special arrangement that they are the ones that have clearance that you went through the Israeli airport even- It's at every airport, when you are coming to Israel. And, just imagine, if it was the 45 minutes that you say- it was long? I go through three checkpoints everyday. And each takes me at least one hour to cross the checkpoint. So imagine having to go through this three times a day. And I work five days a week but on Saturdays- my grandmother is sick- and we take turns. So Saturday's my day, so it's six days- I go through the checkpoints. And Sunday, let's say we want to go out of the house, we have to go through the checkpoints. So, just to talk about the checkpoints- it's not the humiliation and it's not everything else. It's just going in the same hassle that you went through for 45 minutes, I'm going through it three times. Not me. I mean, it's more than one million Palestinians everyday. So I mean, you might get a small feeling from it. At least, I'm sure they were polite and they were speaking polite. They were not making body movements like this [VIOLENT ARM STROKES]. So I mean, maybe this will give you an idea- **small** idea.

Uh…

I mean, I could say it all- the humiliation and everything- but just for you to relate, if it's a memory that is fresh in your mind. This is how it is.

So you're repeatedly and consistently not treated well by the soldiers when passing through the checkpoints?

Yes. Of course, I cannot generalize. Sometimes you meet a good soldier. But this is the exception […] especially, you know, eighteen year olds with big guns trying to play off in front of each other. And even if you are not treated well, the person in front of you may not be treated well. And because it is the routine of the way we are treated, unfortunately, we really don't know as humans if this is the right way to be- . I mean, if this is normal, how to be treated. We don't know… any other way to be treated, so. For me, it used to really used to make me angry- the humiliation- but this takes [GARBLED].

So in your opinion, you feel that the checkpoints are created a much larger problem than any kind of solution that the Israeli Defense Forces feels that it is accomplishing?

I mean, it's… Israel, it keeps saying this line that the wall and the checkpoints are for security reasons. I would contribute more that- just don't have them in the middle of my house! Have them through the Green Zone- through what the U.N. sees as the borders. That us, the Palestinians, are accepting to live on 22% of our struggled land. Let's live on these borders. They don't want. So why does the Wall have to- four times I have to go through three checkpoints to go to work, which is ten minutes from my house. Is this normal? So I mean, this is all lies and they just say them. It's all lies and it doesn't take much to just go to Ramallah and come back- you will see. The Wall- really, it's a tool to steal more land. They got it free from your tax money to build it. [It] gave them a good excuse to steal half of the West Bank. Even more- 60% of the West Bank. Empty land, all our water supplies, all our green land. And everybody knows, I mean, if you build a 4 meter wall, I can very easily build a 5 meter ladder. It doesn't take a genius. And Muslims, when during Ramadan they wanted to go and pray- they bring the ladders and they jump. I mean, if you really believe it is really built for security reasons, go to Kalandiya […] checkpoint. Everyday, they arrest 100 people [at least] who have been living in Jerusalem **illegally**. They jump and they come under or- it doesn't make sense. So if you want to witness how many people have no IDs who are [living] in Jerusalem […] just go and see how many people they arrest, from one checkpoint. When they are checking even people from Jerusalem, coming into the West Bank. Or going from one side to the other side of the checkpoint, because this is all the West Bank.

In April 2002 when Palestinian fighters were held up in the Church of the Nativity, surrounded by the IDF on the outside- what was your reaction and your opinion of this event?

I mean, it's really not exactly how you got it. Because by chance I was in Greece at that time. And when they made the whole agreement, two of the people who were caught in the Church, Israel said that they should not be in the country. And, uh… they made them come to Greece. They were distributed amongst, in the agreement- I don't know if you followed the story. Two came to Greece and at that time I was studying in Greece and I was working- because I was with the student councils of the university- we were working on demonstrations. Actually, every week we had demonstrations, and they used to come to our demonstrations. They are not terrorists and everything. This has been the tradition in our countries for two thousand years when- they are not fighters. They were people in that area that got scared from the tanks and went into the Church. Some of them, yes- they are militant. But the wide majority they are people who were scared. And has been the tradition in our country- or if you are in the Middle East- if you are scared of

something in general, the safest place always to be is the sanctuary. Nobody will harm you, inside a church or a mosque or a synagogue. If you go there, nobody would come. And this is so that the world would protect them. They went and they hid in the Church, and this is normal. If I was in the area and there were tanks coming, I would run to the church. And this is what happened. It did not affect me. I felt a little… uh, upset with the church leaders that this is the only place actually, the only holy site, that all the church agreed this is the right place. You go to any other place and they say, 'no, it was really here' or there is a place for the orthodox. All the churches agreed that it is the birthplace of Jesus, and people were being shot in it. I mean, this is where Jesus was born. Even more than the humiliation, people so scared, people were starving- they were eating leaves of the trees. You can go and see the church. Many people were killed by snipers when they tried to collect leaves from the trees… this, it made me- not with the people that went to hide. It is the people who were shooting […] there were no bullets coming out of the Church. **None** of those people had blood on their hands. Even according to the Israeli side of the story. None of them are murderers. The worst you could say is that they were resistant, some of them resisted… maybe a handful. Some of them. The wide majority… I don't know, they got scared and they ran into the Church. You would do the same thing. So it's the frustration that came out. The world community and the church could be so silent during such an event.

It's interesting you say that because the reports we got in the U.S. was that there was deliberate damage done inside the Church, done by the people who fled inside of it. Do you know if that is inaccurate?

Inaccurate, definitely. Because some of those people, I don't know how many days they lived there. 50? Let us live in the office [here] for 50 days without having prepared anything- no food or anything. One toilet, no water for the toilets. This place would be damaged. So I mean, 50 people. We would sleep on benches. I don't know, break some wood for heating, I don't know. It would not be a clean place.

Transcript
Interview: Bahjat Khader & Saleem Dawani
Thursday 7 June 2007
St. George Cathedral, Jerusalem

Craig: This is Craig Noyes interviewing on Thursday June 7, 2007 at St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem. And, just for the record, what is your full name?

Bahjat: Well, my name is Bahjat Khader.

Saleem: I am Saleem Dawani.

And how old are you?

I am 29 years old.

I am 27 years old.

And where were you born?

I was actually in Denmark.

I was born in Nablus.

Have you lived in Nablus your entire life?

Yes, I live in Nablus, yeah.

And when did you come here to the region?

No, no. I was just born in Denmark. I came to- I'm living in (Zebabdee). My family lives in (Zebabdee). I came at the age two years. I was two years old when I came here… to this land.

How many languages do you speak?

Uh… one language. Just the English language. In addition to the Arabic language.

You speak both of those fluently?

Uh, yeah. Nearly yes.

My language Arabic, and little English. [CHUCKLE]

What is your level of education?

Well, both of us have B.A. in accounting and business administration.

When you received your elementary and secondary education, was it in a public school or a private school?

I began my education system in private school then I moved to the public school.

In the public school, yeah.

Do you know the reason for the private school? Was it a Christian private school?

Yes it was. It was a Christian school. It was an evangelical school in Ramallah. It was an [eternal] school, uh… you know, besides the educational side it gives also a religious side and, you know, training and the preaching and all these things.

And what can you say about your public school experience? What was the curriculum like?

[TRANSLATED INTO ARABIC] In the public school, you have a little Christians in this school… uh… [SMILE]

What do you intend to do with your education?

Well actually, uh… I got my education in order to have it in the future, if I can use it. But now, I'm studying theology and, you know, if I need my education in the future I will use it. Of course, it benefits me because it's generic information. And we can sometimes manage our associations- our schools, our hospitals. So, besides we need to be educated near- besides the theology, you know? Priests sometimes learn theology in their colleges. Also, they need to be more educated. They need to be more, you know… to have an amount of knowledge in other fields, besides theology. Yeah.

Did you find- through your education- any kind of barriers that made it difficult for you to get the education that you wanted?

As Christians, you mean?

Yeah, it could be any kind of reason, but yeah.

Well, it depends. If it's as Christians, yes, there are some. In general, then no, there's not. Because in general, we were treated like all people who's learning in Palestine. But as Christians. You know, as always, there is some fear from being Christian because we are a minority in the West Bank. And always, you look at yourself like, uh… you are strange or you have something different [and] the majority in your university is not like you. You have things different in traditions, in doctrine, in belief. Uh… you know, sometimes you feel it's like uh, uh, uh… a stage, a wall that you can't move or, you can't pass it. So, that's it.

Do you have any particular examples where you felt those barriers- those walls you were talking about, specifically from non-Christians?

Uh… nearly. It's, it's not necessary for everyone [who's] Christian to feel these walls or to feel these barriers. But some of them discovered these borders. But if I want to talk about them, they're not strong because the people who do this will not make it clear. Like, 'yes we are doing this, in order all people know.' But sometimes you feel it. It's like being covered with something. The person [to whom] these things are directed, he feels it from inside, that they are treating me in a different way, or I am not acceptable to them, or these things. Like, sometimes, even with your relationship between each other, or sometimes from your teacher to you when he knows you are a Christian; sometimes maybe they don't make you feel strange. But they bother you with their questions like, 'what do you believe? What do you eat? What kind of food? How do you live?' And you start to tell them, 'we are like you. We are the same.' And you know, 'we are having the same education.' You know, Christianity in the West Bank faces the same problems that all Christians face in the Middle East because we are a minority. And some people, they don't know us clearly. There is some parts in Palestine that contain Christians. The most parts, they don't take Christians, or they don't deal with Christians. So, they have a lot of questions to ask. Maybe sometimes they ask these questions because they want to know about you, many things. But this cause you many problems, you see. Just asking, asking, asking. You will begin to say, 'please, just

give me a break! I'm not a human being- I'm not a, a, an alien that came from- I'm like you! Just please stop asking!' Sometimes it's directed directly to you that you are not acceptable, like we don't want you. Or Christians are non-believers, you know… un-believers. These things, all.

Do you feel at any point you felt uncomfortable showing your faith or doing Christian traditions visible to non-Christians in your community?

Again please?

Do you ever feel uncomfortable showing your Christian faith to others?

Of course not, no. Not at all. Uh… we always feel comfortable showing to them our Christianity. But the main point is that we are controlled by the circumstances around us. Like, I can't show my Christianity all the time and everywhere. If we wanted to talk about religions, we must have some subject that are open, that have been opened to talk to or to talk in, or about. But you can't, by yourself, deal with these subjects and start talking because they will not accept it. And, uh, the main point of view that is happening in Palestine [is] they don't like hearing about religions. It has not been something acceptable to hear. Like, we don't want to feel in a way that we are separated or that we are, uh… you know, not acceptable to each other. If we want to talk about religions, we need to talk in order to clear our point of views to each other. Not in order to make differences or to hurt each other. So if I have to choose, I need a subject to talk about my Christianity or the other side wants to talk about his… well, it must be an occasion to talk. Or like you, an interview. Or in class, to our teacher. Or, like, uh… a search, a searching between two students. Or if you were friends, so you can talk freely.

Are you often in contact and do you foster friendships with non-Christians?

Yes, sure. Yes. We do have many friends, many non-Christian friends. You know, Christianity and the little differences between you do not prevent you from being friends. I mean, generally they are good. They treat us well, in a good way. Except some circumstances, when they behave strangely. But in the common life, they treat you well. I mean, we are living with them, so we are one people. Uh, my country… in, in my village- where my family lives- […] it includes half, fifty-fifty, 50% Christians and Muslims. So we have to deal with each other. We can't make barriers, we can't make wars with each other. Yeah.

You said there were certain circumstances when you felt that contention, that difficulty. When would that arise?

Well I will give you an example. Um… when our teacher in class began to name our names- saying our names- then the class would discover there is a name that seems to be a Christian. […] In the class, they began to whisper to each other, you know, 'there is a Christian among us! He is between us!' Or, 'what strange name is this?' Or, 'what does your name mean?' There are many questions that you can feel that you are strange. In this way. Like, before the teacher began naming our names, everything was okay. I was with you and you were treating me well and everything was okay. After you found out that I have a Christian name, you began asking and you felt like, 'oh, we should keep away.' It happens, like these things.

In your opinion, do you feel that the contention comes from a lack of understanding or a lacking appreciation of the Christian faith? When those people learn about you, are they more open or do you find that a barrier is still there?

This question comes from two points. The first one is because they don't know anything about us. Knowing nothing about us, they need to ask. They need answers! They want to know who is

this person and how does he believe. The second point is they know about us [and] either they want to clarify what they know or they know and they want to make sure what they heard about us is correct, so they ask.

So you don't feel that those questions are necessarily negative?

Some of them- yes. Some of them are negative. Some of them, of course, sometimes we feel that they have reasonable questions. And sometimes you have to answer a question that is not necessary to answer.

So you think that more people are attempting to understand, while the lesser amount of people are negative?

Yes, most of them **do** understand. And they try to treat us well and they try to make us feel comfortable and make us feel safe. It's like a few people in this society who's trying to, uh… you know, asking questions. Or, who are trying to make this whole between us. But, uh, in general, they know us and they know who we are and they don't need to ask any questions.

In your opinion, what is the most important job currently for the Palestinian Authority? For any government?

What's their job, according to?

What's their most important job?

[PAUSE] This question is in general? Not according to the Christians?

In general.

Our Authority has many things to do. We are facing a difficult situation and well, well, I do not know… I'm not that much in politics, but um… it must organize, uh, the things that must be organized first in order to the […] Authority clean. You know. Second, it must also make feedback to all its work, from the past years. Because, in the past years there were many mistakes made by this Authority, in its ministries or in its jobs or in…. in, in the financial side. The most important problem that occurs [is] in the financial side. Our Authority must deal with many things, or many sides. Uh, it has problems insides, in its internal system. And also, the political situation and what is going on outside is also increasing this problem. Like, we are making a problem in Palestine, inside our relationship- in, in the relationship between the people and the Authority and the Authority itself. And also there are problems coming from that political side, the relationship between the Authority and Israel and how to arrange the peace between each other. You know, first we have to fix our internal system, fix our relationship between each other, and then we will look to go out and fix everything else.

Are you happy with the Christian participation in politics and within the Palestinian Authority?

Yes, of course. It should be. We are a minority in Palestine. We are just- we make just 1½% in the West Bank but we need to participate in the Authority. Or, not only in the Authority. We need to participate in the political work. It's very important to show that Christians- the Arab Palestinian Christians- are participating in all the political sides like, uh, you know… uh, national festivals, like supporting our Authority, like a stop against violence, like a stop and say no to the Occupation. All these things that support our opinion, because it's very important to let our society feel that we are with you. Because we are within the society.

Would you like to see the development of a political party that is based on Christianity, not dissimilar to the way that Hamas is based on Islam?

No, no, no, no, no. This is not important. We do not seek to establish a party for us that, you know, that takes Christianity as title. We seek just to first, be safe. The second, to participate with people. And the third, that we be fair in our relationship with others.

What is your opinion of the rise of Hamas and the elections in 2006?

[EXHALE] Well, um… my opinion is, uh, [it] was a necessary to raise a party like Hamas. I mean, why? Because… Hamas was not born yesterday. Hamas, as a Palestinian party, came after, you know, after many political events. And in 2006, what happened, was there were big financial problems inside Palestine, besides many other problems that the people couldn't imagine or couldn't cooperate with it. Like, they said we can't keep going, that's enough, you know? So, they wanted to make something different. They wanted a change, and when Hamas came to the rule and came holding some words, 'we want to change and we want to fix our political situation.' So people wanted this, even if they don't know what is going on or if they don't know what Hamas will do in the future. But let us try, let us change. We know the last party, what it did. And we know all the conclusions. Let us just have new ones.

Do you feel that a good number of people voted for Hamas because of its Islamic line and its basis in the Islamic faith?

(24:24) No, no, no. Not this reason. This isn't because simply… uh, most of the Christians voted for Hamas. And they know it's an Islamic party. This matter is not based on religion. I mean, it may be in the past. I mean, from the first race. From the first time that Hamas established, uh… it based on religion. Yes, and we know that. And we know that sometimes- not sometimes, all the time, that Hamas… uh, with the struggle with Israel, it makes all the things in the name of religion. But at this point- this is a different point- people voted for Hamas because for two reasons, let me say. The first reason, they don't feel that it has something to do with religion because they know Hamas and they know it's an Islamic party and, uh, they know what Hamas will do if Hamas took the rule in Palestine. But, they say, 'we want something new.' And they voted because- this is the second point- they say even if it was based on religion, we will not die. Just, we need to, um… to show another face to our Authority. To show another life to our people. Another daily movement in our relationship. There were many hard occasions that happened in the past years in our West Bank and in Palestine. And you can't imagine- before Hamas came to the rule, there was [a lot] of fighting, so much fighting, so much shooting. There began to appear different kinds of groups that are not organized groups, working as what their mind told them. No one ruled them. So, we need to have security, among people! We need security. Well, I think that people know that Hamas maybe will not change that much. I mean, these things, these… hard acts, maybe some of these things keep happening until now. They didn't change. But it's something from inside. People say, 'okay, let us try.' Even if no change will come.

So, do you feel that any Christians are concerned that Hamas- if it stays in power- and maintains or increases its popularity, that it's Islamic line would strengthen and could eventually threaten non-Muslims in Palestine?

… uh… Well I don't know. I can't give a certain answer about this question. But, um… maybe yes, maybe no. Well, maybe we are not facing that big problem because we have something else that our people is busy with. You know, with Occupation, with some internal problems between people and among our Authority. But we do know what will happen if we had our security that we are asking for and we lived in peace. Maybe we will begin to face this religious problem. We don't

know. But, generally, Hamas will seek for spreading the Islam rule among Palestine. This is something sure to happen. If there is nothing to do, if there is no struggle, if there is no fight, and if our- and if this Islamic party has all the time to think and [write] plans for the future, to develop our political sections and our social sections, finally it will reach a point where it will start to think to make an Islamic life, to make an Islamic rule. Yeah, that is exactly what will happen.

So at that point, would it be disadvantageous for Christians?

It's not that, uh, big disadvantages. We can say that our life will change because, um… maybe they will treat us well. But they will let us pay, uh… for being safe. You know?

You're talking, historically, [about] the jizya?

Jizya. That's exactly what I meant! Yes.

Okay. [talking about studies on Dhimmitude] […] Do you feel that [not being equal with Muslims] is a concern, or do you feel that people are willing to deal with that?

Uh, no. In Palestine, it's something different. I can talk about both sides. First one, locally, about Palestine here. The second one, generally about the Arabic world. In Palestine, we do not feel, uh, this matter. We are all equal. For example, in our Authority, there are high positions for Christians. There are high positions for Christians in our universities. There are also, you know, good positions for teachers, for doctors. Students are equal. I'm not talking about some small matters that happen between students or between a student and his teacher. This is another matter. But I'm talking about how do we feel when we see, like, a Christian man or a Christian women from Palestine that has a good position? Yes we can feel this is in Palestine. Like, it is not [like this] in Egypt. In Egypt, for example, Christians reach a certain position that he is not able to go over. And he will keep in this position until he retires! But in Palestine, until now, it's not. Yeah.

So, with the first few drafts of the Palestinian Authority's constitution, there has been the ascertain that Shari'a law will be one of the bases for the judicial system. How do you feel about this?

I need you to repeat the question.

Sure. It's been said that Shari'a law will be one of the bases for law in the Palestinian Authority.

What was that, Shari'a?

The Shari'a law, like Islamic law.

Ah, alright.

What is your opinion on this?

It will be the Islamic rule?!

That it will influence. It will be one of the influences that defines the law within Palestine.

… Yes, of course! It happens all the time. It's the base for the law. Not only in Palestine. In all the Arabic world. In all the Islamic countries, I mean. The law is taken from the Shari'a. The law is taken from the religion. This is something known. We can't pass this thing. If they want to judge, they will judge according to Shari'a. If they want to rule, they will rule according to Shari'a. If they want to teach… in our educational system, uh… many stuff, many materials is depending on the Shari'a. So, it's something mixed with our life! And… and this is why all the Christians- or most of the Christians, the Arabic Christians- especially, I need to talk about Palestine, because I am not sure about outside. But, uh, generally, most of the Christians in Palestine have good

information about the Islam and the Muslims. Because they can feel the Shari'a in their daily life. In all the sections in their lives. I can feel it in my education. Anywhere and everywhere. Even if I see one sentence that related to the Shari'a law, I will find. In the judgment, in the court. If I wanted to deal with a case, a certain case, they will go back to the Shari'a to make it clear. If I want to go to ask a lawyer to help me with something, he will begin with his Shari'a. Unless if we use our Christian courts, because we have our own courts. We have our own church that has special courts for us. But if we want to use the government courts, it's something else. We will find there the Shari'a, of course.

[Framing questions pertaining to Christian emigration] What do you think accounts for [the higher rate of Christian emigration from Palestine than that of Muslim emigration]? What do you think its causes are?

This is a big subject. This is the subject all the Christian Palestinians focus on. You know, it's something that we've been talking about for many years and years. Emigration is one of the big problems for us in Palestine. We lost all our numbers, you know. We lost our majority in some places. For example, in Ramallah, as I know there were more than fifty thousand Christian in Ramallah. Now you are just talking about eight thousand. What about the forty two thousand? So, uh… according to the reasons that make them emigrate, there are many reasons, actually. You know, the first reason- seeking for freedom. Uh… running away from Occupation, running away from barriers, you know. … They want a better life.

So you think they don't feel freedom here?

No. Uh… if they want to feel a freedom here, they will feel a limited freedom. It's just in their houses. And if he went out of his house, he would be in a limited relationship, because he would be forbidden to be late in the night. He will be forced to close his store or his shop, uh… whenever a problem happened for the Jews or the soldiers. Uh… sometimes we will not be able to go out of his door and… you know… this is not a freedom, I mean. He wants to be free whenever he goes, where ever he goes. So, they can see that if they emigrate, they will find this. The second reason, of course, for making money- some of them. Uh, our political situation damaged the financial side in Palestine. No work, so no money. You know. Even the large works, the commercial side, has no movements. We have plenty of young men who sit at home with no work. No income for most of the families. And this is something so serious. So they had to emigrate because they learn from each other. If they saw someone who emigrated in the last five years and made some money, they will follow. Because they can feel that he is comfortable in his life. So, the political side, uh… this is the first point, that causes non-freedom, that causes no work. So, no money. And third point is to feel safe, and this is so important, also. Christian families have a special adjective. Have a special way of living. They feel afraid [for] their children. They feel afraid [for] their families. They are not used to fighting. They like life and they enjoy their lives. So they can't imagine [to be] ready to hear bombs, everyday. To live in shooting. They can't keep on with the sounds of weapons and… uh, the father for his family will always in his work, for example, keep busy [for] his son who is playing in the street. He's afraid from a bullet or a bomb or something. He's worried whether he can return home with food for his family or not. Uh... all these things together make your life miserable. Yeah.

To what extent do fellow Palestinians- specifically Muslims- contribute to the feeling of a lack of freedom that leads Christians to emigrate?

Again, please.

Is the emigration caused by any kinds of limitations or frustration that they feel from their Muslim- um- fellow Palestinians?

Well, no. Not this side. If I understood clearly your question, it's not this side. I mean, anyone who wants to emigrate, he will emigrate because **he feels** that it's good for him in the future to emigrate. Some families, they refuse to emigrate. For example, my family, you know… uh, did not accept the idea of emigration because they have lands here. They have a lot of work. Even if this work is so weak and it does not gain that much, but they can't leave it, you know? This work, this family, this land, or these houses are their tradition, you know. Their tradition case. They can't leave it! You know, it depends on one another. Like what you feel. What are your concepts towards these things? Some Palestinians they say, 'I will not leave my land in order to make money.' Or in order to be free. No. I can't, you know… I can't, uh, make myself be used to this situation and live with this situation and not leave my land. Others feel in a different way. 'I don't need this land, I will come later. I need to spend some of my time in life in peace. And in freedom.' So it depends on the individuals.

Do you think that this emigration, this Christian emigration, will continue?

Yes, sure it will. [DEEP BREATH] It will continue because, as long as we have a miserable political situation, it will continue. But church- nowadays- they are making their efforts in stopping emigration.

What are they doing?

Well, um, you know… they, they [make people aware] of the disadvantages of leaving the Holy Land. You know. In the whole, in the whole media. And they hold many meetings, uh, to let people know that, uh, that they can't leave their land because of many important things that they have to do inside. Church talks to people to make them- to be sure of the importance of the existence of Christians in their land. Yes. Because this is very important. Always, from the spiritual side, we say that it's very important to stay in our land because it's a support… it's uh… even if it's a little support, sometimes some people they can feel it a little, but it's very strong, in its influence. And for support to the Christians still here, that they are still here, that they did not emigrate. You know, we need to see that there are still many people inside. If we felt like we are decreasing, this is a problem. They begin to be afraid.

So do you think that the churches and the Christian community are doing enough to try to keep to stay or do you think they should be doing something else?

It's not that enough. It's doing. You know, it's doing, but it's not that enough. The church must, you know, must change its way in dealing with this problem. Because when the church tries to prevent people from emigrating, and… maybe it degrees, the number of emigrates. But it must be, uh, prevention [for] all. Then the number would be zero. Or at least 10%. If we couldn't make it zero. So, it's not enough. If the church prevented 50%, it must work on the other 50%.

Do you feel that there could be a point that there are so few Christians that they lose their voice either within the political sphere or they lose their ability to contribute to the Palestinian identity?

Losing it why?

Because the population would be so small that it wouldn't be recognized.

No, no, no. This will never happen. The good thing in our Authority that, you know, the general attributes and the general attitudes will keep the same, even before emigration. It will be the same. Like in the cities and the villages that have contained in the past the majority of

Christians, it will be at the same political treatments. At the same rules, even though now it contains a minority of Christians. Yeah, like the president of the municipality- of a city, a certain city- like in Ramallah. There were many Christians, so the president of Ramallah must be Christian. Now, it contains just eight thousand from, let us say, nearly one hundred thirty thousand. But still, the president of this municipality is Christian!

[LONG PAUSE] Have your lives been affected by the building of the Separation Barrier?

Well, uh, actually… nearly yes. I will tell you why, nearly. Because… as Christians, first we are Palestinians. So, we hate separation within our nation, you know. We are one nation. So this wall [is considered] an illness inside our nation. It's something dangerous. But, we do not feel it that strong because we are far, far away from it. Far, far away from it. The people who felt it seriously, they are the people who live, you know, near this wall. The people who this wall prevents them from seeing their neighbors […]. Sometimes, this wall separated one family from each other. You know?

[Church of the Nativity in April 2002 description] What is your opinion? What is your take on the event?

This is a **great** thing that we can feel that some uh… our church, or this important church- according to our belief- can protect people even though they are non-Christians. Because we can see that church is the place where we can feel safe. Uh, either from the spiritual side or the social side. And, church- the church in general- also… it is open all the time. Never closed, all the time, to those who are in need [of] protection and feeling safety. You know. So, and if the church was asked for any help, I think it will do it. For course, yes, it will do it. Because this is Christianity and the church mission: to help and to protect and to give peace for people.

[Describing media reports of vandalism in the Church] What is your opinion on this? Do you know what particular kind of damage it was? Do you have an opinion as to why that damage inside the church…?

Well, no, no. I don't have that much experience or that much information on what damages. But, we saw that on T.V. We were unable to go- to reach there. But I think that one monk was killed and, uh, they shot him when he was standing beside the bell. And, uh… I don't know if the body of the Church, from the outside, was damaged. But I think that they surrounded the Church and they hit the members of the Church in order to force them to bring out the people who were inside. But, I'm not sure about any other damages.

Okay… one final question […]. How would you define yourself? If some asked you, 'who are you?' What would you say?

Well, uh… say that, first, I'm Arabic. Second, I'm Palestinian Christian man. Yeah.

Yes, it's the same, yeah.

Transcript
Interview: Rev. Hosam Naoum & Rev. Na'el abu Rahmoun
Thursday 7 June 2007
St. George Cathedral, Jerusalem

Craig: This is Craig Noyes interviewing on Thursday June 7, 2007 at St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem. Can I have your full names, please?

Hosam: I am Reverend Hosam Naoum, acting dean at St. George's Cathedral.

Na'el: Well, my name is Reverend Na'el abu Rahmoun, a priest on the staff at the Cathedral of St. Georges, here in Jerusalem.

And how old are you?

I am 34 years old.

28.

And where were you born?

I was born in [Chef amir] in Galilee. It's a place next to Nazareth.

I was born in Galilee, as well, in a village just between Nazareth and [Canaa].

Have you lived in those locations your entire life or have you lived in other places?

Well, during my childhood, yes. Then I went to seminary and then I started my work in the diocese, so I was in Nablus for ten years and then I was in Jerusalem for two years and a half.

Yeah, same thing, yeah.

How many languages do you speak?

I speak three languages fluently: Arabic, Hebrew, and English. And some languages, here and there. [CHUCKLE]

One more. Like I speak Italian, very well. A little Spanish. I can understand and speak a little bit.

Can you describe for me your level of education?

Yes, I have a degree in theology and it's my [GARBLED] in Rose University, St. Paul's or what we called Transfiguration College in [GARBLED] in South Africa. And that was my degree in theology there.

Yeah, I have studied in Rome for five years so I have a bachelors [degree] in philosophy and a bachelors [degree] in theology in the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Your elementary and secondary education, was it as a private school or at a public school?

My primary school was in governmental school- public school. But I studied in [Abeleen], a private school […].

Yeah, private schools in elementary. [NAMES THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL ATTENDED] and then the high school in Nazareth, [Salejian's] Fathers School.

Could you explain to me the curriculum at the government school?

Well in the town I lived in- [Chef amir]- the curriculum, of course, it is similar to all the schools in Israel because it's set by the Ministry of Education. So it's a curriculum that is basically Arabic in language, but it also has in it all the important aspects of education that's set by the government and the Ministry of Education. But basically we have Hebrew and English and all things and all subjects are taught in Arabic, basically. Besides English and Hebrew, of course. They would be in Hebrew.

And the private school education- that curriculum- could you both describe that for me please?

You know, it's almost one and the same because even the private schools really have to stick to the curriculum that is set by the government. They can't just teach whatever they want. So it's basically the same. The only difference, sometimes, in the area that private schools would be more strict and more- or less students in the class. So basically we are talking about secondary things that go into the whole process of education. In addition to the whole aspect of the environment, itself. The standard of students. Uh… all that stuff that really differs. But, uh, the curriculum really wouldn't be a problem. A major difference, I would say.

I think the same. It's just the aspect of education. It's very important- you can find the difference between private school and, uh, regular school. Then, like, the languages. Like, you can the students that studied in private schools, they will speak better- for example- English than the others. Or French, some schools.

In your personal lives as well as your studies, how would you describe your interaction with non-Christians?

Well, basically I see myself as part of a greater community. I'm a Christian- that's true- but at the same time I wouldn't exclude myself from the rest of society and the environment around me. I have Muslim friends and Jewish friends and I have no problems dealing with these people because I see myself as part of this community and I will not categorize myself and put myself aside because I am Christian.

Yeah. We have- all of us- Muslim friends and Jewish friends. But talking about schools- because we studied in Arab schools- so you find Muslims and Christians studying together in Arabic. And if you go and do this statistics of all private schools, or Christian schools, you can find that percent of Muslim students [is] more than 50% and 65% you can find Muslim students. So in the same school, the same class, we study together. We are friends- we do everything together.

Do you find that your feelings about interactions with other people and being a part of a greater community are reciprocated on the whole or do you feel that there is any degree of boundaries or separation based upon the definitions of religion?

We need, of course, we talk about interaction and coexisting but definitely there are boundaries, especially when it comes to religion. You know, like for example- I will give you an example- in our school when we were having our religious class, our class of religion, some Christians would go into their class and Muslims would go into their class. So at the same time, I would say that it's definitely… we are different. We are different. And we have different perceptions on certain things and different norms, sometimes. And we have different points of view on certain things. So

I wouldn't say we are the same. We are different but at the same time we live together, we exist, to certain extent. And then when it comes to issues like religion, uh, and definitely there are some values… our weddings are not like Muslim weddings [and] not like the Jewish weddings. So, it depends what you are talking about. But to a certain level, I would say we agree on the minimum, on the minimum. And we share between ourselves. […] So there are boundaries, at some stages. And it differs from one place to another. In Jerusalem, it's not the same like in Galilee. In Galilee, or in Jerusalem, it's not the same as the West Bank. So it depends [on where you are]. And the area affects the whole interaction and Jerusalem would really be **very** different from Haifa, which is very similar. We have Arabs and Jews together, but the difference of cooperation between these two people is totally- not totally, but very large extent- it is different. Like, in Jerusalem, there is not even one single school that has Arabs and Jews together. Whereas, in Haifa there is. In Ramallah and Lud, there is. So in places there is studying to together in the same classroom. But here in Jerusalem, you won't find that. That's just a little example.

Yeah, just to add a few things about, like. Because we will talk about this relationship between Christians, Muslims, and Jews and others. We can't forget the fact about minority. Of that Christians are minority in this land. And, uh, as a minority, I'm going to say it makes the thing- the issue- more difficult. But then… as we said before, like, we agree on **many** things. But then, because of the affect of minority, it's a problem because we can't just identify ourselves easily or our thoughts or our way or sides of things. So it's not easy, but it's very important to keep our identity and to say we are, yes, Palestinians- Arabs- but also Christians.

Do you find at any point, or do you have any examples, where those differences are maintained through malicious intent or any kind of resentment from non-Christians?

[LONG PAUSE] It depends on what level you are talking about. If it's school level, or if it's everyday living issues. It depends what thing you are talking about.

Could we start with the social, everyday interaction?

Yeah, everyday interaction would be- see, definitely religion has become, especially lately… in latest years and specifically after 9/11. It has become an issue and the religious awareness has grown. So, unfortunately to a certain degree- or even to a large degree- we find that religion is a kind of common thing that brings people together. So, your friends would be in the same category and the same religion and you do things together. So you go to mosque together or you go to church together. And that involves other things, as well. Uh, resentments… I don't know how strongly that is found in the society. But, like I said, there are these boundaries. But if one exceeds these boundaries, then maybe you can find some resentment or some, uh… not good feelings, ill feelings. The words, things. Especially if you push your difference. If you try to make your difference so clear and if you try to push forward with whatever you think and try to impose it on others. So here, it becomes the confrontation, I would say, or the dispute or these kind of things. There are no kinds of examples I could give but I think about an… an, I would say like an… it's not only one specific thing but what I have in mind is many things that involve everyday, uh… way of life. Like weddings- the way you do your weddings. If you have, uh- you have to be sensitive. If to invite men and women together- some societies don't accept this. In the Muslim culture. So it has to be women alone or men alone. So these kinds of things you have to sensitive about-

So, would you… Is the concern that… With the wedding example, do you need to be concerned that people outside of the wedding party- maybe not even attendants at the wedding- see the wedding party with men and women, together?

Eh, yeah- well, well. It's not- yeah. Well, it could be insulting, in a way. But what I'm saying here. Like in places like Nablus, for example, I have an incident with one of my parishioners who knows a lot of Muslims and has many Muslim friends. So in order to be fair to them, what he did- he did exactly like the Muslims do. So he would- he brought- he did kind of two wedding parties, or receptions. One reception was for the men and women, especially for those who, I would say, were outside the family. Especially Muslims. And then would have the wedding at the church and the reception after that. You know, this is one way of describing it. Others wouldn't- wouldn't really mind it. They invite, and those who come, come. And those who don't come, don't come. Something like that. So people are sensitive. People- they do what they do. And the same thing with Muslims. What they do, they invite- if they are doing a party for women- so they invite women in one. And they- or men alone. Something like that. So, that's- some people look at it as something insulting. But if you know the other culture or where they're coming from, you know, you don't feel insulted that your wife was invited alone without you. Or vice versa. So this is an example.

How about yourself? Just going back to the question-

Yes, this daily-

Yeah-

Social things. Um… I don't want to generalize, it's just some cases. In general, the situation, it's not like this. But let's speak and talk about going to find and search for job. Like, as Arab- not only Christian or Muslim. As an Arab […] if I go to a Jewish place or the owner is Jewish- Jew- to find a job and ask for job. So sometimes, for some Jewish people, that will be a problem, or they will not accept you. They will say, 'no, we don't need, uh, anyone to work,' or something. So this is just some cases, but this is the reality. In general, you can find the positive side and you can find Jewish and Muslim and Christians, as my father, working all together for long years [and] long time. But in some cases, you find this problem about- because you are Arab, sometimes [because] you are Christian or because you are Muslim- so they don't accept you.

Do you find that the conflict, or the people who are willing to accept you, are found in one demographic? […] Do you think it's from on demographic, or is it certain people of all sorts?

[PAUSE] Uh… well… there is some truth in each and every one. And speak specifically why there is truth in everyone. General one is true. That incident that Father Na'el spoke about is one example. It's general to Arabs. And then, what more that even some [CHUCKLE], some Jewish companies or factories or facilities will simply put one qualification with the rest- that that person should have served in the army. And then- so we don't serve in the army so that disqualifies us automatically. You know, that's an example. But I would also agree with the marginalized or the disadvantaged backgrounds. It's true because they don't have much of an option. Whereas educated- and they could have other options that create less conflict atmosphere or less resentment. Because they could find other alternatives and options. So, but the problem is- in its roots- is the overall, general concept, rather than being or speaking about a targeted group or such.

Yeah, I think just to add things about how, in general, the people think. Like, from the Israeli side. We talked about finding jobs and things, but let's talk about education and universities. Like, as a student- Arab student- and finishing high school and would like to go to university. The same reason, some universities unfortunately, they don't accept you if you are less than twenty one years old because then that means after your military service. So, this is one problem- Arabs can't- because we don't do this military service. As well as for some subjects- I can't, as Arab, study

whatever I want. For example, we were just today- actually, this morning- kidding about this. Like, I can't be a pilot. I can't be. As Arab. I am Israeli, as well, because I have the Israeli passport- I am a citizen. I can't be a pilot, for example. Or for some subjects, I can't study. Or if they study certain things, but they can't go and visit with all other students. They will [say], 'you can wait here for us, when we come back and you will join us.' They do that! Everybody knows that here in the state of Israel. So these problems- this is how Israelis think, in general. So if we talk about universities, this is the situation.

Do you find that your parishioners come to you with stories about any difficulties they have interacting with non-Christians? Or, on the whole, it's an issue that isn't really broadcasted?

Uh, there are some incidences, but I didn't have any- like during my stay- we didn't have any incidences that were dramatic. But of course, the overall general that people feel or sometimes speak about… There is nothing really dramatic, like I said. Because, you see, because, again… we are a minority. And to live in a society that the majority or Muslim- or Jewish- it's difficult. If you try to fight or make your feeling strong and start to speak about them and try to confront- that is not helpful for them or for us. So we rather speak about dialogue and debate and try to be polite and accept others. Because like, as a minority we don't have much of a choice, really. … You can't… There is a saying in Arabic. Literally it says, 'you can't just punch a screwdriver with your palm.' You know what I mean, a screwdriver. You can't just hit the- it's a kind of saying that we say. We just use this.

Yeah, I have nothing to add. […] (21:46) I mention just one thing. As clergy here, we just can't not to talk about the issue or the presence of this Separation Wall, or some people call it the Security Wall. Because some of our people, they live now behind the wall. They have difficulties arriving to the services and to meetings. It is very difficult for them so they prefer not to come, because it will take a long time- a few hours. And in the past, before the wall, it used to take maybe 30 minutes, or less. And now, it'll take three, four, or five hours- sometimes. So this is very, very, very difficult for them- very difficult for us, for our ministry here. So that will- we'll see how they are treated. By soldiers or by, by other authorities and things. So this is an important issue, as well.

[…] In the West Bank it is much worse. There are people who don't leave Nablus, for example, for years.

What is your opinion of the rise of popularity and influence […] of Hamas? Why do you think people voted for them in January of 2006?

The overall, general feeling was- and many people would say that- that it was a vote against, not a vote for. A vote against Fatah rather than a vote for Hamas. I don't know if that is entirely true or not, but again, I come from the conviction that after 9/11, the strong feel and the… of being religious or being attached to religion has become very strong. It has become the identity. Because like in the olden days, like 10 years ago for example, you will be speaking about your nationality as a Palestinian, as an Arab and not as a Muslim or as a Jewish person. Now it has become different, and this is the problem. And I think we as Palestinians are losing because of that fact. Because the whole struggle or conflict has shifted from its purpose as a national issue- it's a Palestinian issue- and it's become more of a religious issue. So I think, I'm convinced that there are these two main reasons. That there was a vote against, which may be true for some. They are frustrated and they are dissatisfied and they have seen nothing done for them through the Fatah regime so they try- give a chance for Hamas to be. And the other one I talk about which is very strong- strongly growing- not only in Palestine. It's growing in Egypt and Syria and now we see it in Iraq and in Lebanon and

in all countries. This is something… I think that… and I would allow myself to say that I really claim the West in general- not just the States but I think the whole policy of the Western World- I blame their policy for that. They are held accountable for this. Because the minute they declared war on terrorism- or war on Islam- maybe they try to make it more polite but it's very clear and people are not stupid to read between the lines. And whether that true or not, but I think the way they dealt with it was wrong. And Iraq is a very clear example for what is happening.

Yeah, I think the same about- basically it was a vote **against** Fatah. I think because of the- everybody knows about the corruption of Fatah and others- so the people saw in Hamas… maybe they will work. But believe it or not, but some Christians actually voted for Hamas. This was surprising and shocking. But I met some Christians and they told me, 'yes, I voted for Hamas as well.' Um, I think that if Israelis- and also the world- just respected and accepted the democratic elections of the Palestinians in the beginning, and not just immediately ask Hamas to recognize Israel, they would [eventually] recognize it. But just wait a little bit. Why they didn't just give a chance to Hamas to do something to work. At least six months- they didn't even give them a day. They just didn't accept that. And now, with the coalition in the Palestinian- so you find Fatah and Hamas and others- in the same government. But still, they are not accepted at all- in all the world, even in Israel. So it's not here we can find who's interested in working for justice, for peace, for reconciliation, or not. We have to give each other the chance to work and to deal with us.

[…] Are you concerned that this [shift from national identity to more religious identities] will continue and that it is a serious threat to any kind of Palestinian unity or unified national identity?

See, I'm concerned not with Palestine [simply]. We live in, not only Palestine and Israel, but we live in a greater geographic setting. And the Middle East is always looked at as one unit, one way or the other. It's all interconnected. And I think that the whole situation that we see now- either in Iraq or in Lebanon or in Syria, or even in Egypt- it's all connected with the Palestinian cause. Everybody is worried about the Palestinian issue. And as some people would describe it- and this is the way we see it as Christians. You know, peace will not be implemented in the Middle East, and even in the whole world, unless peace will prevail in Jerusalem. And the shortest way to Baghdad and to Beirut and to Cairo is through Jerusalem. This is our concern. And I think that if the Palestinian issue is solved, it will be a good thing. So coming back to the question, if we have an anxiety or fear or concern- you know, the concern is there. I'm concerned not because of the religious growth or the awareness that is [being created] in the new setting and new thinking in the Middle East. I'm concerned about the whole situation in general. You know, what could this drive us to? Because I think the more we try to treat people as terrorists and look upon them as third world countries and uncivilized people and terrorists and all of that- that is not helpful. This is not the way you can create a free world. Because you can't impose on people things that you know or things that you **think** that they are for the best or you like to speak about the **new** Middle East or the bigger Middle East. These are terms that are not really accepted in the, uh… for the street. For the Palestinian street, for the Lebanese street. Because this is really what breaks people from each other. This is what disunites people. Because you find people who are interested in this policy for their own reason. Either they are benefited or for their interests. And definitely, you will always find war rich people and those who will benefit from it. At the same time, there are people who are convinced that this is not for the good of the country. So, it's my fear. My fear that this will create division. And division creates turmoil. And turmoil will lead the whole country and the whole region into the unknown. This is my biggest fear. I'm not afraid of Hamas as a group or… No, we've lived in much worse situations, under the Turkish rule. And we have lived in a situation where it was an Islamic, uh, country altogether during the invasions or what they call, 'the

openings' of Islam. We survived and the Jews survived and we are **still** surviving. This is not a concern because we know that we have a very long history and heritage together. But we are concerned about the fragmentation of our society. And to where this could lead us. That's my concern.

Yeah, it's not easy always to speak after him. [LAUGHTER]

You speak first. [SMILING]

Yeah, maybe I can switch it up or something.

No, it's okay. It's okay. I think unfortunately, the Palestinians- especially those living in the West Bank and Gaza. A few years ago, they lost… uh, uh… what we call nationalism. And that changed because the world and Israel called it terrorism. But it was very clear the difference between terrorism and nationalism. And even if they were doing- like, attacking Israeli people, there was always- and there is actually, I think, in international law. There is difference if I attack- I kill, as a Palestinian, I go and kill a soldier or a settler who lives in my land, the international law can understand this- can accept this, because you are defending your people, your freedom, and your country, your land. But then, so there is a difference if I go, as a Palestinian, and kill a child or a woman or civilians. So this is the fault or the mistake that Palestinians did- that they started. And they- some of them- switched from nationalism, or nationalists, to terrorists. Because they were doing uh… like, suicide bombs in restaurants and buses. So that was, in my opinion, was very… [it was a] mistake that changed the whole vision or the whole side for the Palestinian people in the land. So then, we can find the reactions and then the results of how the religious aspect changed and you can see it very, very evident.

Five minutes?

Five minutes, then I have to go. We can continue with it later.

Yeah, we have about 20 minutes and then we will be done, too… Um… Okay […] From your knowledge, do you know to what extent Christians either participated or what their opinions were of both Intifadas? […]

(Na'el) Yeah, because Christians were more involved in the First Intifada, I think it's the reason- the main reason- was because the second already was after the beginning of Oslo and after the Palestinian Authority was already here, so was, uh… the, the… the Islamic movements […] was very clear and was very- you can find the Islam movements very strong. You couldn't find where the Christians, they can fit. It was very difficult for them. So it was very different between of the First Intifada, so... Until today, you can find Christians, but not as Christians. They are involved in some parties, but after Oslo and after all the Palestinian Authority, uh… because of what I said about the nationalism. The switch to terrorism- I mean, not always to terrorism, but- they just lost it. So you can find how these movements and groups- sometimes fundamentalists- and others. So, as a fundamentalist, and as a group- if I'm a Muslim group- where I can find myself as Christian? It was very difficult for Christians to be involved in things. But, as all, I think some bishops and the heads of churches in this city- they always mention about, 'yes, we are against the Occupation and are with the Intifada, but we always- non-violence and with peace, or non-violent resistance.' So, that is the rule and thank God, I mean… we can't forget about some Christians who were killed by Israelis and Israeli soldiers in Bethlehem and in other places. But we still always say about and preach about, 'yes, we are for peace and against the Occupation.' Now it's the fortieth anniversary-

forty years after the Occupation of Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza… the Golan. But non-violence, it's always the main thing for Christians.

Yeah, in addition to that, of course, I think that violence, in general, is not accepted in the Christian way of thinking. And this is what makes us vulnerable, sometimes. To either criticism or… not doing enough, on the one hand. On the other hand, we are getting some applauses, here and there, that we are not doing this. It's difficult, really, for us to find our way in the struggle. Today, specifically, because in the First Intifada it was different, as Father Na'el has mentioned. And the second thing that some people even were… a bit concerned- not concerned. But they felt, you know, that the Intifada itself is not their own because of one simple reason that it was called Al-Aqsa Intifada because it started on an Al-Aqsa issue rather than if it is a Jerusalem or a Palestinian issue. I understand that the majority of Palestinians are Muslims and I would understand where they are coming from. So you have 99% or 98% of the population are Muslim, so it's definitely more meaningful to call it this way. You know what I mean. But at the same time, you know, coming first with the first reason which is non-violent approach. And then, that would be less- much less. It's not a big deal that it was called the Al-Aqsa Intifada. But again, the whole cause of itself created the kind of non-interest in the subject, so to speak. I don't know if that's true, but I could feel it sometimes, from people saying here and there. Although, that's not the big issue. Again, the first is, rather, the one.

Should we let you go, do you need to get going?
Yeah, I need to get going. [HOSAM LEAVES]

Is it okay if you continue with us for a few moments?
Yeah, no problem.

Thank you so much for meeting with us. It was a pleasure meeting- [TAPE STOPPED]

Alrighty, um… now another question that pertains to the Second Intifada is related to the event in 2002 when a group of Palestinians […] were held up in the Church of the Nativity. Can you tell me about your opinion of the event as well as any particulars of the event? […]
Actually, in 2002 I wasn't here. [CHUCKLE]

Okay. [CHUCKLE]
I was doing my studying in Rome. But from that time I already- I mean, for a long time I have good relationship- friendship- with some of the monks living in Bethlehem. Some of them until today- they are the Franciscan monks in Bethlehem [living] in the Nativity Church. So I- during that time, that almost 40 days… So I called sometimes. Actually, it's difficult until today what really happened during that period. Or, if that some people say, 'oh, why did they open for the Palestinians' or some other people said, 'of, Israelis continued to shoot the Nativity Church.' So it was- it's very difficult, actually, to analyze what really happened. But I think what really the monks did, also with other Christian communities in the Nativity Church or the Greek Orthodox, the Armenian Orthodox, etc. So I think they **had** to open for them, and this is always as… almost a **duty** for monks and for Christians to welcome others. That happened in many other times in different parts of the world, even in the- at the time of the… in Germany or in Poland or that, before the Second World War. Um… I think what the Jewish and the Israelis- not Jewish, let's say Israelis- soldiers or government did that was very, **very** bad- very sad- was how they didn't just consider that [it was the] Nativity Church. One of the best, or the most important, holy Christian places. They

just killed also, and shooted, from- some, some, some… Palestinians. But let's also not judge but let's say also what other people- who could do more things- and they didn't do. I know that the Vatican, as was Catholic side of the Franciscans and so belonged to the Vatican, to the Pope, and say, 'world, through the diplomatic representatives here,' and another things. But I think they didn't do enough for that issue. They didn't work. Like, at the beginning of that […] what happened in Bethlehem, and the Church inside, with the two hundred Palestinians, there were 5 Italian journalists. For five days, I think. And **how** the Italians worked with the [diplomacy], with the U.N., with other organizations, after five days they just agreed and took them and they traveled. So why for Palestinians nobody did what exactly needed to be done? I know that they tried hard, but they I think, they could do more things. And especially the agreement, at the end, about some, about 13 of them. Just to isolate them to Greece or to Cyprus or to Gaza or whatever. So it wasn't a good agreement, according to my opinion. Because if we agree on something, we all need to be happy after this agreement. Just not, we don't just say, 'yes they go out, but these things, these people, I take this, I take that'… no. So again, what the churches, other churches as well. I know to this day they work hard. But, still, there is always a lot to do. From the Christians and especially the leaders- the heads of churches. I know how some bishops- but other bishops now, they prefer not to talk, not to speak about this. But how you, as a leader- as a religious leader- me as a priest, how I can't mention this situation? How can I not think about **my** people or my parishioners? As I mentioned before, they have difficulty arriving to the service. How can I not mention this situation here to people like you, people from England, the States, from all over the world? So this is the situation here. And when we talk, we talk as Palestinians- on behalf of the Palestinians- but especially of Christians, as well. And this is what I think we need to do, and to do more and more, to think about Christians, especially here. I just recently read statistics about, uh… Christians in Sydney, Australia. And it's- maybe you will not believe- but it's very sad to know that in Sydney today you can find more Palestinian Christians than Palestinian Christians in Jerusalem. Very sad. But this is the truth. And in a few year- in ten, in twenty, in forty years- will there be Christians here or not?

What do you think?

I don't want to say no. [CHUCKLING] But I don't want to think even, but I know this- we need to do things. We need to do something. As Christians, as leaders, as clergy, we need to do something for our Christian people. Because few of the Muslims will think to leave the country. But many of the Christians, they will think immediately to go. They went, many people already gone. Until today, they still leave the country, and this is very sad. A few days, I was- last week, actually- I went to a concert in the west side, West Jerusalem, but it's a Christian convent, and there was a concert. And the concert and the choir was coming from the Bethlehem area, so they worked hard for months to get the permits for them to come and to sing here. And I just had a small chat, talking with one guy from the choir, and we were talking about Christianity issues and about Christians in the land and they're leaving and so 'we want to stay and we want to do,' he was saying. And he just, I can't forget what he told me. Just this sentence from the Gospel about changing the something, now I will mention it. You remember in the Gospel when Jesus said […] when the Lord will come back, will he find faith? Will he find faith? This is what is written in the Gospel. But this guy said to me, 'but when our Lord Jesus will come back to this land, will he find **Christians** here?' It's a little thing about it. It's very simple. It's very… just like the words, 'will he find Christians?' But if we think about it, it's very sad. I just, I mean, I just joke about this. Yeah, well, we need someone to welcome him, at least. Because our hospitality here. But it's very sad to know, will he find Christians here? So for that we always give, or are evident about not only all our groups and pilgrims and tourists, not only to visit the churches, which are the stones, or the

buildings. They are very beautiful, very important, the Holy Sepulchre, the Nativity. This is the Anglican Cathedral in Jerusalem, ed cetera. But what about the living stones? Maybe you hear about these words already, but we keep repeated it, the living stones. This is the church, the living stones. The people form the church itself, not the buildings. So this is why we- it's very important for us- when we have groups, we present them to our people and they talk together and they know each other. How to support that local Christian community here, which is a very small community. Supporting and… just in the prayer, which is very important, and then through other projects and with the church through our church [LISTS DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS], they do projects and things for Christians here. So this is how, I mean, I ask for your support and for **others** from the West to support, especially this land and the Christians in this land. So, especially for Christians, lest you forget your sisters and brothers in Christ, here. Not sisters and brothers, only, in human being, as human beings. But especially now as Christians, in Christ.

[…]

I think as they say, 'hope is the last to die.' So there is always hope and actually only the hope is keeping us here in the land and continuing our ministry through the people, not only the Christians but to our people living here in this time.

Transcript
Interview: Laura George Nasar
Friday 8 June 2007
Lutheran Church, Bethlehem

Craig: This is Craig Noyes interviewing in Bethlehem on 8 June- Friday- 2007. Can I have your full name, please?

Laura: My name is Laura George Nasar.

And how old are you?

I'm 27.

And where were you born?

I was born in Bethlehem […]

Now have you lived in Bethlehem your whole life?

Yes, I've been living here my whole life.

How many languages do you speak?

Actually, I speak English and my mother tongue is Arabic. And a little bit of French because I studied at school for 12 years. But because I don't practice it so, it's a little bit difficult for me to- but I can understand the French.

What is your level of education?

I have a B.A. degree in English literature, minor in translation.

Where did you receive that from?

Bethlehem University.

Right in town. [CHUCKLE]

[LAUGHTER] Yeah, right in town.

Where did you receive your elementary and secondary education? Was it at a public or a private school?

It was a private school, yeah.

Could you describe that for me?

It's called St. George's School. It's an all-girl's school. It's related to the Franciscan school and, uh, since the kindergarten I have taken my education, from the kindergarten until I finished my higher education. The Tawjihi, the higher level, yeah. After that, I moved to the Bethlehem University.

Could you explain to us the curriculum within that private school.

Uh, you know, it's, uh… in my day- since 1985? Yeah. Since then we used to have the- not the Palestinian curriculum, the older one. And we had normal English, Arabic, and we had history, science- all in Arabic language. But after that, they had the new curriculum- the Palestinian curriculum. But before that, we had the older curriculum.

The one under Jordanian-

Yes. The Jordanian system.

And did you receive further schooling on the Christian faith there?

We had. We had special lectures with a Christianity teacher and she used to like explain the Bible, give us lectures on that. Yeah.

Could you explain to us the decision to go to a private school rather than a public school?

Um… The education is different, and it's much better. The teachers are different and you get a better education. For example, if I want to study English, I go to private schools because the teachers are very good. But they make sure that they give you the right education in that. So you finish high school speaking very well English. So, this is only an example. So the education, the teaching is different. The teachers are different.

When you were in the private school- were there [INTERRUPTED BY PHONE CALL]. Was there anything in the public education at the time that you felt was not beneficial for Christians?

[CHUCKLE] Nothing that I recall. But no, I don't think so. No.

When you were in the private school, were your fellow students all Christian or did you have non-Christians as well?

In my class, most of them were Christian. But we had four or three only Muslims.

And how was that relationship in the student body?

Very normal. Very normal. Yeah. We were friends. We never had any problems. Not at all.

So you don't think that religion was a barrier at all?

Never. No, no. Never. [CHUCKLE]

Do you find that you are offered all the educational opportunities that you desire?

Uh, at that time, yes. But when you grow older, you think that, 'no, I didn't learn this in school. It would be better if they had told us that- that, maybe, special subject.' Now, I think no. I didn't get it from schooling, the education that I needed. But in seven years or eight years ago I would tell you, 'yes, I go it fully.' But-

What do you think lacked from that education? What subjects would you have liked to learn about?

Um… you know, like daily life. Very, very important things. Like I don't care that I studied the history, like… I don't know how many years ago- I don't care about it. They would have- it would have been better if they told us something about the Palestinian history. Or something about the daily life or something more… you can use [out] of. You know. Sometimes I feel that we have wasted our time. Like, learning the history of other people- lies- and not learning something more useful, you know.

[…] Which denomination of Christianity do you practice with in your faith?

Uh… I'm Orthodox. Armenian Orthodox.

And how often do you attend church?

I attend church [CHUCKLE] like, every Sunday. Every Sunday.

And how many people are in your congregation?

To tell you the truth, because I'm Armenian and I don't speak the language, I do not go to the Armenian Church because if I go to that mass, I don't understand it. So I go to the Catholic- to the Catholic church- because they speak the Arabic language and I can practice with the… participate in the mass. There are many, many. Like, the church is big. I can't say… 200, 300 attending? Yeah.

Are you active in any other aspect of the church community other than going to mass?

Not really. Nowadays, I'm interested in other things, you know. Other things. I don't really have much time to go into church activities. But I go to mass. Other than that, no.

Do you know what sort of activities your church offers to the congregation? Like social activities or economic empowerment opportunities?

Yeah, they have meetings for youth. They give them social activities and they meet together like once a week. [They] discuss a certain topic, play games maybe. I think that this is what they do, yeah. They go on trips if they have the possibility to do that outside of Bethlehem. Yeah. Some activities for youth.

Do you wish or think they should have more organizations or be more active in the daily lives of the Christians?

The church, you mean? Yeah, yeah. Definitely. Other churches, they are very much into the families. But our church, because we are very small, like we are only 400 hundred in our church. And the church is not that active here in Bethlehem. I wish that one day this will change and they will go more in the houses of Armenian Christian families. Go into their houses, help them more, maybe give them more possibilities, chances to work- social activities. I don't know, whatever helps the families, I could go on.

You mentioned that you wish that the church would help the community with opportunities for jobs. Could you explain that a little bit more? Is there difficulty for Christians to find jobs in the area?

Yes. This is [CHUCKLE] happening not only for, uh… but it happens to many youth- young people that are fresh graduates do not find jobs. And sometimes the church… I sometimes think the church has to help them find jobs. And they can if they want. They can. The church can help if they want. Because we don't have many potentials here for the youth. And this will give them- immediately- the thinking of leaving town. And looking for better opportunities outside of Palestine. So you can see many Christian youth- young people- leaving Bethlehem to look for the future outside of town.

Traditionally, Bethlehem has been a predominantly Christian community throughout history. What do you think accounts, now, for the difficulty finding jobs here?

What is the reason, you mean?

Yeah.

Um, the town depends a lot on tourism. And nowadays, because of the political situation, we don't have many tourists coming. If you pass through the town, you can see all- most of the stores are empty. And the souvenir shops are empty. So, this is mainly that makes people think to look for jobs outside of Bethlehem. Mainly, the tourism. The tourism is not helping at all. If tourists are here, you can see the shops are full, restaurants are working, hotels are working. So, but nowadays, nothing of that is working.

Do you find at all that any existing jobs held by Christians are being challenged by either non-Christians […] or the lack of tourism?

Um… challenged?

Christians that have jobs, currently. Do you think they are threats of losing their jobs?

Some of them, I think, yes. They will not- it won't take them long. Because, you know, if one institution depends on tourism, tourism is not that… is not that powerful in that place. Sooner or later, this place will close, if they depend on tourism. And I think that… I never heard of something of an institute that will close because a lack of jobs, but I'm sure it will close one day because a lack of jobs.

How often are you in contact with non-Christians in your daily life?

Uh… I can say quite a good deal times. I'm thinking today. Like, I had two phone calls from non-Christians. Uh, yeah… but today, because it's Friday, nobody's around. So it's less than other days. But yes, in daily life I'm in contact with other non-Christians.

How would you say, in general, the relations between Christians and Muslims are here in Bethlehem?

Personally, I don't have any problem living with them. There's always respect and there's always good relations. Other than that, I have no problems. At all.

Do you know of any friends or family that have come in conflict with non-Christians in the community?

You can hear something like that, but not many incidents. Not many.

Do you find at all that- for instance, I see that you are wearing a cross on your neck. Do you find that any broadcasting of your religion- showing the cross- will cause any… Do you fear at all that-

Never. Never. No, no. Not at all. Even if I'm in a non-Christian place, I am not afraid of showing it. No. Not at all. I will never hide it. [CHUCKLE]

So, would you say that your contact with non-Christians is ever influenced by your religious identity?

Uh… Nothing I can think- nothing I can think of, no. Personally, no, it's not… it's not doing any conflict to me. [INTERRUPTED BY PHONE CALL]

Alrighty… In your opinion, what do you think is the most job of the Palestinian Authority is right now?

Oh! [LAUGHTER] Difficult question for me! As I'm not into politics. The most important job for the Palestinian Authority?

Yes.

Um… peace between Hamas and Fatah, I think. This is- the conflict between Fatah and Hamas is making everybody crazy. So they have to solve their problems first and then continue with the peace process.

What is your opinion of Hamas as a party and, also, the reasons for their election at the beginning of 2006?

Oh! [CHUCKLE] You are asking questions that I might not be able to answer! Because I'm not very much into politics and not much into Hamas and Fatah, so-

Okay.

I really… uh, don't know.

Did you vote in that election?

Yeah. I had to.

Okay.

I was against, actually, voting. But I was trapped by a friend of mine, and I went because I don't want to lose a voice. So I went. And I wasn't convinced.

Of course, you can decline to answer this question, but can I ask what party you voted for?

Uh… I won't answer. [CHUCKLE]

Okay.

Yeah.

[…] After 1994 there was the re-districting of Bethlehem itself, which changed the demographics quite a bit. Where you aware of this or do you know anyone who was immediately affected by this? What is your opinion?

You mean, the separation between A, B, C areas? I know many people who are affected by that. And for example, my house is in a C area. The C area, you know, it is for Palestinians and for Israelis. And sometimes we feel it is for nobody. If anything happens bad in our neighborhood, you can not get any security. Police can not come to the C area, so we are for no one. So this is affecting us big time. Yeah.

So do you feel that since '94 and the establishment of the A, B, C areas and the organization of the Palestinian Authority things have stayed the same, improved, or decreased?

Decreased, yeah. Big time.

Can you describe, for instance, politically and economically how things have decreased?

Uh, politically we are squeezed. Like we are in an open prison. Like sometimes, areas in Bethlehem, you can not go to it unless you have a permit. And if you want to go to that area, you are stopped and checked- in Bethlehem itself. In economics, definitely it is affected. For example, goods from Jerusalem are not allowed to come here. And if they are allowed to come here, you need special permits to have them here. For example, jobs. We are not allowed to go work in Jerusalem. We don't have special permits and we are only… it's very… we can not. It's forbidden for us to go to Jerusalem, because we have the Palestinian ID. And if you don't have Israeli ID or permit, we are not allowed to go. So this affected the economy.

Okay, I have a group of questions about the Separation Wall, as well. Can you tell me how that's affected your life as well as the community of Bethlehem?

Um… the, the Wall is like ten minutes walk from my house. And if I go up to the roof, I can see it. It's uh- just looking at it makes you feel, you know- suffocated. Uh… whenever you walk in the streets and walk beside it… you know, the feeling is very bad, about the wall. It is bad. And definitely it affected people- psychologically, economically, socially. In all aspects you can think of. It affected us, so bad. And I thank God our house is a little bit far from the Wall. Look and think about other people where the Wall is on three sides of the house. It's really like two meters, really, from the house to the Wall. Two meters space. It's really suffocating people and affecting their health, psychology, economically, everything.

[…] Do you find people have more a disposition towards anger or violence outbursts because of it?

You mean, like people taking revenge?

Not necessarily targeted towards Israel. And kind of psychology anger or frustration that they feel.

I know a woman that has a heart attack because of the Wall. It is surrounding the house on three sides. It is really affecting her health and she's an old lady and she's suffering from heart attacks now because of the Wall. So it is affecting her.

Could you describe for us your experience and what you saw throughout the course of the Intifada starting in September of 2000 as well as the incursion by Israeli troops into Bethlehem?

Yeah. You just reminded me. Actually, in the 2000… um, I was about to graduate from the university. And we had hopes and dreams of the graduation party and the future and what we are going to do and job opportunities. Like, continuing maybe my master's degree and- . Now, all these dreams that I dreamt of, nothing happened. And then we thought that things would get better and hopefully- [then] we had the Forty Day's Invasion. And that was a very, very, very bad experience for me. At that period of time we were living- you know the Nativity Church compound? Where it was invaded? That was the center of the invasion and I was living there. Like shooting, bombing, uh… getting into our house- the Israeli soldiers went into our house like three or four times and they were kicking us out of the house as if it was their house. I was shot at. I was standing on the balcony and a bullet came… on the- after, behind my-

You could hear it whistle by?

Yeah! It was over my head. Because I was bored and I wanted to stand on the balcony. He saw me. The soldier saw me and he shot at me. And it was very close. We were not- it was curfew the first twenty three days, it was curfew and we were not allowed to move and to leave the house. Other people were allowed. They didn't have curfew but only us- we had curfews.

Was that because of where you were?

Yes. The location, yes. Only the Nativity Church compound. Other people in town, they were allowed to go for like one or two hours a day. For the first twenty three days we were not allowed. Until we begged the Israelis to let us go bring food. Otherwise, we couldn't- we had no electricity, no food, nothing at all.

*So you were actually **in** the Church of the Nativity?*

No. We were not in the Church.

Okay.

The Church was invaded and we were in a house very close to the Nativity Church. We were very close to the Bethlehem Municipality. Very close to the banks and- we were very close- like five minutes walk from the Nativity to my house. So, it was a **very** bad experience.

[…] Can you tell us about your knowledge [of the hold-up in the Nativity Church]?

Yeah, that was what I was speaking about. This was the experience I had. As I told you, actually immediately after the invasion, we left the house. We couldn't stay there any longer. Because the experience was very bad. Like shooting every night. Bombing every night. As I told you, the soldiers- **and martyrs**- it was very, very bad experience.

*Do you know anyone who was specifically held up **within** the Church?*

Yeah, I know many of them, actually, yes. I know many of them.

If you know any of their stories, do mind relaying them to us now?

Actually, I don't… I don't know much stories but I remember that there is a man- he was an old, poor man. He was living in the Church and he was one of the martyrs. His brother was my neighbor and he was telling us about the way he was shot. Because the people there saw everything and they told the brother of the martyr and he told us. And it was very bad because he was shot at and his blood was all over the place and the people couldn't… couldn't go and bring him because shooting was all over and he was left, like, for a day or two until they could go and manage and bring the body.

Was this man ever armed?

No. No, he was very poor, actually. Very… he has nothing to do with arms, I mean.

How many people- would you say, percentage wise- how many people in that Church were Christian and how many people were non-Christian?

I don't know how many but the majority were not Christian.

Okay. And how many would you say had weapons or arms?

Uh… I really don't know, but I think a good number. A good number of them.

[…] There were reports of damage within the church and desecration of the alter, etc. Can you tell us if that's accurate?

Well, to tell you the truth, immediately after the Israelis left, I was one of the people that went to the Church. What I saw… there were damages, but there were damages in the upper ceiling. Like, the windows were broken. But inside, I could see like blankets. I could see spoons, tables, plates. Cause you know, people were **living** there. And I could see like an oven, a gasoline. That's all I could see and I could see untidy place. But touching and ruining the holy place, I couldn't see any of that. No, nothing like that.

So you would disagree that there was any deliberate damage to the Church by the people inside?

No, no, no. Nothing. But from the inside- from the **outside**, yes there was. Like the stones were damaged, the rooms. You could see bullets all over the place. Uh… shattered windows, glass all over. But from the inside, no nothing. And you can go there now and see nothing, nothing at all.

That's very interesting, because of the reports given to the outside world.

I can understand, because this is the media. [CHUCKLE]

How would you say if- and this is a big if, a hypothetical. If there was a just peace and the Palestinians were able to govern themselves, how do you feel the Christian population would be able interact and contribute to the Palestinian national identity? [INTERRUPTED BY PHONE CALL]

Sorry!

No, it's okay.

How would, if we governed ourselves, how would-

How would the Christians participate?

Uh… if we are given an opportunity, we can do- the Christians can do a **very** good job in governing the Palestinian Authority. I'm sure of that. Because we have very highly potential people. And I'm sure that we can rule ourselves really, really well.

Do you think that the Christian community would be given the opportunity to speak their mind or participate in the government?

Yeah, why not? Yeah, definitely. Already, in the government we have many Christians. And they are doing a very good job.

[Speaking about Shari'a law's influence in the Palestinian draft constitutions]

Maybe. [CHUCKLE] I really have no comments to say on that.

Do you have any opinion about that?

Never thought of it. [CHUCKLE]

[…] What do you think account for [the higher rate of Christian emigration from the Holy Land than Muslims]?

Uh, maybe better lifestyle. Different, like uh… better job opportunities, better social life, better economic- . You know, you are living life once. And either you live it properly or not. I'm sure that people who think of emigrating, they want a better life. They're not happy- they have none. So this is why I think people are living.

Which reasons in Palestine are making them leave? What is not making them happy?

For example, the Wall. The… lack of freedom. The lack of freedom of movement. The lack of job opportunities. This is mainly the reasons for them.

Are you- do you know any people who have emigrated from Palestine?

Actually, my cousin, he was here like twenty minutes ago and he is emigrating. He will leave next month.

Do you know where he is going?

He's going to Dubai. He got a better offer and he's leaving.

Have you ever desired to emigrate?

Well, to tell you the truth, the idea comes to my mind from now and then. It comes to my mind. So… maybe. [CHUCKLE]

For what reasons for you, specifically?

Um, I'm thinking about continuing my education. So, because I love Bethlehem, I can't just live away. But if I get a better life opportunity, why not? I might think about leaving.

So you think you will return at the completion of that education?

No, I will come back. Definitely, I will come back.

Do you think that the Christian emigration will continue in the future?

Yeah. It will.

Do you think that the emigration will continue to the point that a presence of the Christian population in the region will be challenged?

We're already a minority. So, this tells a lot. Many, many, many families- many Christian families- have left. And you can see that Christians now are very few. Very strangers.

Do you think that the minority status inhibits your freedoms anymore?

Uh… in a way, yeah. [PAUSE]

In relation to what, exactly?

Uh… well, for example, uh… what comes to my mind is the way of… wearing my clothes. I have to take care, because I can not just put on my clothes freely because I might hear comments. So, this is just an example. You can not- this is one aspect you have to think about before like walking the streets. I have to be, uh, decent. [CHUCKLE] Because you are walking with, uh… like, uh, strangers. And you can not allow anybody to tell you one comment. So, this is very important **for a girl** to think about when **living** here when you are a minority.

Have you had an experience when someone chastised you for what you were wearing?

Uh, it happened. It happens a lot, even when I'm decent. It happened.

Even when you are decently dressed? So what do you think the reasons are?

Uh… I don't know. The way of… uh, of them being raised. I really don't know. But you have to ignore such comment and, uh, know how to act. You know, I park my car here outside of the center. And from the office of the center- it's only like two minutes, in the street! I many times here comments many comments. From the entrance to the center to my car- like two minutes- and I **always** hear comments. See… the mentality is really making you feel sick. [CHUCKLE]

Anything else besides that which makes you feel sick or like a minority?

Uh… nothing that comes to my mind because I am a person that does not have… relations with non-Christians. Not many. Only for work. I can not… not many incidents happen to me that are very major that I can talk about. No.

Would you like to start up relationships with non-Christians?

… I'm happy without it. [LAUGHTER]

Do you think that non-Christians would be willing or want to start up friendships with you?

Uh… [LONG PAUSE] Recently nothing, nothing I can recall. No. Since the university days I didn't have any friends from them. Only, like, very- on the surface.

Do you think that eventually […] that the Christian population will have to assimilate into the [Muslim] culture or have to be more conscious of projecting their Christianity in public?

Uh… maybe. But when? It will take time. Now we are very much into religion. I'm not sure that we can easily get rid of our Christianity. But maybe with time. I don't know.

One final question that I'd like to ask you is, if someone was to ask you to identify yourself, what would you say? Who are you?

Uh… I would say, Palestinian- very proud Palestinian girl. I think that's enough, that I can tell. I can tell who I am.

Transcript
Interview: Habib Karam
Monday 11 June 2007
Rosary Sisters, Nazareth

Craig: This is Craig Noyes doing interviews in Nazareth on Monday 11 June 2007. Can I have your full name, please?

Habib: My name is Habib Karam.

And how old are you?

I'm 43.

And where were you born?

I was born in Nazareth.

And have you lived in Nazareth your whole life?

No. I lived here until I was sixteen and finished high school, moved to the U.S., got my education, worked over there for twenty one years, while at that time got married, and my wife and my kids and I moved back here in 2001.

Back to Nazareth?

Back to Nazareth.

Could you explain your level of education?

I have a Bachelors- B.S.- in electrical engineering, and M.B.A.

Did you receive those from, like you said, Long Beach State?

Uh, Bachelors I received in 1986 from Long Beach State University. Then 1993 I got my M.B.A. from the University of Phoenix.

Now, could you describe your primary and secondary education here? What kind of curriculum you had and what kind of schools you went to.

Uh, from first grade until twenth grade- senior year- at [Terra Sante] College, which is the Franciscan brother's college, which is right next to the Annunciation Church. And during school we- I remember from second grade we started learning 3 languages. Arabic, Hebrew, and English, along with all the science and math and all that. And when I got into junior and senior year, which is eleventh and twenth grade, I started concentrating on chemistry and physics as my subjects, you know, to go to.

Could you explain the decision to go to the private or religious school and not to go to the public schools?

There are a lot- as for high schools, there are maybe eight or nine in Nazareth. One is a public school, the rest are religious schools. Besides my, my… we belong to the Catholic Church, so that was a given. It was an all boys school. It was mostly an all boys school and that was one of the only all boys school- Catholic school- the rest were all girls school. So, that was a choice. My dad went to that same school, it was a natural choice to go to that school, too.

Now, in this school, were all the students Christian, or did they also educate some non-Christians?

Yeah, it was Christians and Muslims. There was a larger percentage of Christians, of course, and a small percentage of Muslims. But I had friends on both sides, so… We, I remember we had some religious education classes where the Muslims would go out and play in the yard and we would attend to the class.

Where the Muslims then offered some religious education classes of their own?

No.

No, okay. Alrighty. Do you feel- within your home, when you were growing up in Nazareth as well as when you were in the States- that you were given an equal opportunity to any of the education that you desired?

One of the reasons, I think, that enticed me to stay and work and go… get my education in the States- I went actually to visit my uncles and my aunt and my grandma who live in L.A. and I decided to stay because at that day when I was growing up, getting educated in the Israeli system and- you know- a Jewish college was very, very hard. Very difficult to get into the college. You had, uh… you had to get grades, or, uh… only, you know… a very small percentage of people got in. While at that time, the Jewish kids did not have to get those grades to go to college. So it was- and I saw that opportunity to attend college in the U.S. You know, there wasn't discrimination on, you know, who you are or based on your gender or anything like that. If you got the marks, you got in. So they… so that better opportunity. So the opportunity- it's better over there to get educated- so I decided to stay there and get educated over there.

And what guided your decision to eventually return- as you said- in 2002.

Uh, my wife was originally born over here. But when she was 11, her family moved to Australia. Then she lived 11 years there and we got married and lived in the U.S. And I have kids over there. Basically I saw… I wanted my kids to be around the family that I grew up with. I wanted the kids to know who their aunts and uncles and grandparents, uh… my wife and I are family people and when I grew up, uh… over here, everybody was around us. When I lived in the States, I lived with my uncle. But when I got a job and moved to the San Francisco Bay area, there was nobody- no relatives. But I wanted my kids to be in that environment. And in California, at that time, it wasn't safe. You know, you couldn't let your kids play out in the yard on their own. You couldn't go to the park and you sit down and have a drink and your kids aren't playing because there was a lot of kidnapping at that time. So, we didn't want our kids to be raised in that environment. Now, you know, people say, 'well, you know, education, kids, and the future.' Education is more open right now that it used to be when I was a kid. A lot more Arabs get into college over here- with the right grades. And my kids have American passports, so if they want to go one time and get educated over there, that's fine too.

Were the political events and the conflagration during the 2nd Intifada any particular kind of concern for you coming over? Did you feel like it would affect Nazareth?

No. No, not really. Um… because, in Nazareth, I felt that everything was happening away from Nazareth. The Second Intifada was in October in 2000. There were some problems in Nazareth. That's before we came. But, uh… it was- it was away, you know. West Bank, it's forty five minutes from here. And people in L.A., friends say, 'why do you come here?' I say, 'you know, do you remember the, uh… Watts riots back in the '70's, you know?' And I was living in Downey. And Downey far from Watts maybe in a half an hour. I say, you know, it's the same

thing. It's the same thing. You don't feel what's going on there, but I mean, it's close. But at the same time, you're far away.

So, do you feel that Nazareth has been completely untouched by the Intifada? Do you feel that any kind of relations have changed?

No. In October 2000 there were big riots in Nazareth. There were some people out there- Arab Israelis. Thirteen people got killed, by the Israeli Forces. So that's still in the memories of everybody. Got affected, uh, because people could not sit and watch. So they had to- you felt, uh. But everybody went on with their own lives. It's different over here than you living in the West Bank. People feel with them but at the same time they don't live the same life they do. Well, of course we have discrimination over here. It comes to life but it's not the same over there, so. I feel Nazareth is a ghetto. If you know what I mean. It's all Arabs. It's an Arab community. You could work and go to school and everything over here and you don't have to go into any Jewish town.

It's completely self-sufficient?

Yeah.

[…] [Talking about shift from national identity to religious identity] Do you feel that the Arab Israeli population here is affected by that?

Um, I don't think that 9/11 had as much an effect over here in the population as probably people in the West Bank. Because 9/11 happened two months after we arrived from the U.S. It was very hard for me to accept because I know the area. I know- I knew somebody that- I knew two people who were in the building. It, it, it hit me more personally than a lot of people over here. But, I don't think that it affected it at all. No.

As a person living in Nazareth now, what do you feel the highest priority is for the government visa vie the Palestinian Christian population?

Um… I just want to go back so that you understand a little bit where I- when we identify the Arab Christians in Israel, they identify themselves as Arab Palestinians Christians, with Israeli identity. So we struggle with that. What's more, for me, being Christian is very important for me. Being an Arab is very important for me. When I went to- when I went in the States for the first time in 1982 people asked me and I say I'm from Israel, they think I'm Jewish. I say, 'no, I'm Arab,' they think I'm a Muslim. Then I say, 'no, I'm Christian,' they say, 'oh, there are Christians there?' So, uh… 'are you born again?' or something like that. It's very important for our identity over here. We struggle with that. And it's… living with that identity… see as, as, as an Arab, there is not- there is not complete justice from the Israeli government toward Arabs over here. When they say Israel is a democracy, it's a democracy for the Jews. It's only a democracy, but it's not. So we don't feel- we feel that there's discrimination in education, jobs, in a lot of stuff. It's not very much apparent, but there's new polls that say, you know, you have to serve- you go to apply for a job, **even though** it has **nothing** to do with serving in the army, they say you have to serve in the army. Who only serves in the army? The Jewish people. Arabs don't serve in the army. Uh… so, those kind of things affect. And another thing is since 1848 and then 1967, when Palestinians and Arabs over here migrated… people that left mostly were Christian. So the Christian population went down drastically- I don't know if you looked as some figures- went down drastically. So you get- even though it's not much- but there's interaction sometimes between Jews- I mean Muslims and Christians. Not as much as Jewish-Arab, but there is some, some issues that come up. Fanaticism and all that and it happened here in Nazareth, it was very ugly. But, uh… I- the kids I went to school with, they're Muslim and we're still very good friends and I- a lot of my costumers are

Muslims, too. So, there's that relationship. But, again, there are some fanatics that try to hamper that relationship.

But you definitely believe that those people are in the minority?

Yes. Definitely. Definitely.

If you don't mind, even though it is the minority, could you give an example of those kinds of- as you said- ugly confrontations?

I don't know if you've heard of an area called [Shihab al-Din], which is right next to the Church of the Annunciation. There was a piece of land they were saying, you know, it belongs to them. And because there was some fanatic group trying to concentrate on that piece of land and all that, and it kind of enticed a lot of Muslims to go against Christians and there was a lot of confrontation. That's before we came back. But, uh, you still here about it until now. Uh… in the municipality you feel it. Fundamentalist Muslim group that's getting a stronghold in the municipality. There is always that… interaction. There's problems sometimes and all that. So you feel it and, you know… not, not in everyday life. But some, from time to time something comes up and it just hits you, you know.

[…] In everyday life there isn't some kind of contention?

No. Not at all. I go to, you know, to buy bread in the neighborhood from a Muslim shop. And I go buy my fruits and vegetables from a Muslim shop. You know, so it's… it's not… normal life.

Are you aware of any dialogue that goes on between the Muslims and the Christians within the town? Specifically on the clergy level?

Um… no, not really. I'm not aware of anything. We tried- part of Sabeel- to try something, but we haven't done anything yet. We haven't got the clergy to respond.

Do you have any indication why that response is lacking?

Uh… I don't know. I guess they don't, the clergy doesn't find enough interest in it… or benefit to the people to do something like that.

If we could go back a little bit to how you were saying the population is treated by the Israeli government, specifically within the economic realm and jobs. […] Could you explain to us any kind of difficulties or barriers you had in setting up your job here [upon your return to Nazareth]?

Um, when I came back I wasn't planning to work- there was an Arab company that's in upper Nazareth that they asked me to work for them- with them. So I did and I work with them. I tried- I interviewed with some Jewish companies. I did not want to go to Tel Aviv and interview because I came from Nazareth and I didn't want to commute an hour and a half everyday, you know. I did that in the U.S. and I don't want to do that again. [LAUGHS] Uh… so. **By my choice**, I select- I had that selection. But I know people that went for job interviews and a lot of the jobs they were turned down because they did not serve in the army. Well, gee wiz, you know, we don't serve in the army. We are not required to serve in the army, so. We feel that's discrimination in part, even though the jobs I said do not at all have anything to do with being in the army. And other ways, uh… I don't know if you've been to Jewish towns, and you saw how the streets are nice and all that and then you come over here in Nazareth and it's not. Because the municipalities in Nazareth don't get as much money as the municipality in a Jewish town. A person told me 25% of what the Jewish town gets, an Arab town gets. So, that affects on the economy. It affects on the people's mentality.

Um, uh… we depend- even though in Nazareth we have jobs here, some people depend on working outside. And they struggle. So.

What needs to be done on behalf of the Christian population, and on behalf of the Arab population, living in Israel to improve the quality of life and relations?

Equality in education. Equality in work. Equality in government aid, you know, to businesses and their opportunity for them to work. Uh, not asking for free money, you know. Allow us the same opportunity that you allow to the Jewish person, and I think everybody will be happy. Will strive through that.

[…] What is your opinion of political parties being defined by Christian identity?

Uh… it's not part of our faith to have political parties, you know. It doesn't mix. That's why, you know- it's needed. It's needed for someone to look after the Christians in the West Bank. That's why I joined Sabeel. Sabeel is an interfaith group that, uh… looks at liberation theology and looks at it from the perspective that says, 'okay, we are the people. We are not just- we are Palestinians, but at the same time we are Christians.' It tries to support that. That's why we have Friends of Sabeel. We had a conference back in, uh, last October or November, where people came from around the world and say, you know, 'the forgotten faithful.' That's what we are, the forgotten faithful. We need to, as Christians, we need to get together and look- you know, that's the way Sabeel helps- look at our sociological issues. Not just being Christians living within a Muslim surrounding but also as Arabs living in an Israeli state. So, you know, look at it from the perspective of a minority **within** a minority.

[…] Which denomination did you say [you were]?

I'm Catholic. I go to church not every Sunday. But I try to make most Sundays. Uh… you know, my kids. I have four kids. We all go to church. And, uh… you know, the kids already who have first communion can stick around. Uh… we, I don't know what else you need to know. Just do the whole thing. I was born and raised Catholic and up until now I'm still practicing.

Does your church have any organizations or groups outside of mass that supports the congregation socially, with jobs-

(21:40) No. Actually, I'm a Roman Catholic but I don't go to church over here. There's a monastery right outside of Nazareth, in [Dalah Aamik]. There's a priest over there, a Franciscan priest, who has a church over there and he has mass on Sundays. And he- all people from all denominations go to that mass. It's a Catholic mass. And he blends in music and songs and guitars and music and he's very charismatic. So, uh… it's different. It's a different atmosphere so we go there. But it's limited to only, uh, you know… just going to church, praying, and having that faith. But it doesn't address- doesn't address at all the social, the social activities in the community.

So then, Sabeel answers that need for you?

Yes. Very much. Yeah, that's why I joined Sabeel.

[Emigration] […] You said that your uncles and your grandmother are in L.A.

I have two uncles and my grandma passed away and my aunt also lives in L.A. I have cousins and they all live in and throughout California. Basically.

Specifically in your family, what were their main reasons for leaving?

Uh… one of my uncles left when there was… after, uh… after high school. I think in 1963. 1965, actually. Way back then. By then it was military rule over here in Israel, and so he went looking for an education, went looking for better jobs and all that. My other uncle, uh… his wife's brother used to live in Ohio so they wanted to move- they wanted her to go over there to find a better jobs and all that. But my uncle was working so they wanted the family, all her brothers were there so they wanted to move. But I see people over here wanted to leave the country, wanted to go. And **every** Christian house in Nazareth has somebody in the U.S. They're living in the U.S. So… people… want to move and think it's better. The grass is green on the other side. Which it's not. You know, there's good things over there and there's bad things. And the same thing. There's good things and bad things over here. You know, economically it might be better over there, but social and family life is almost no. Over here, the social- the social support and family support is very important. So… some people came back. I know a few fam- people like me who worked in the high tech and decided to come back and continue working in high tech.

[…] What do you think accounts for [the higher rate of Christian emigration than Muslim emigration], specifically?

Why is that?

Yep.

I think that the Western world is Christian. So people, it's easier to get blended and accepted in that environment. And there was a lot more Christian families leaving in the old days, so Christians would have relatives over there they could go to- not Muslims. Um… in older days, there was a lot more Christians educated than Muslims because of the schooling. So, when they're educated, they get to have contacts over there and they get to go and find jobs easier and stuff like that. So it's easier for them to, you know. Then people just follow.

[…] What you just listed was a lot of pull factors. Do you think there are any push factors besides the actual discrimination and the difficulties dealing with the Israeli government, are there any social push factors?

I think people are, you know, they find it difficult to find jobs. And being Christians, they look at and might see it differently. That they're getting discrimination not just from the government but from Muslims surrounding… uh… where they're at, especially in Jerusalem, you know. Before 1967 it was 60 maybe 70% Christians. Now it's 2%. I think it's just the surrounding, uh… I wouldn't say more over here of religious reasons, people migrate. I think more of economic reasons- within the state of Israel.

In your opinion, seeing the way they are and the way they've been, do you see Christian emigration continuing?

Um… I hope not. [CHUCKLE] But, uh, I'm afraid that's what's happening. Uh… but, uh… I see a lot more Christians moving than Muslims are. And I feel for the wrong reasons, sometimes. After I talked to a few people, I think we change a family's opinion one time, my wife and I talk to them. People don't look at it from the perspective we see it. So, we try to help them and talk to them. And again, I think a lot of people want to leave this country for the wrong reasons. Sometimes I feel really without thinking about it.

What are those wrong reasons?

Uh… they think that, you know, they're not happy over here, they can't get educated, they can't get jobs and all that. But I feel if you can't really get a job over here, you won't be able to look for

a job and get a job someplace else. So if you don't have the will to, to, to get yourself educated and find yourself a job, that's not going to happen someplace else.

This is quite a hypothetical, so please bear with me. Do you think that if there was a just and peaceful solution to the conflict- the Palestinian- Israeli conflict- and/or the Palestinian Authority was able to stabilize and be able to help and promote the economy and security within the Palestinian territories, do you think that you would start to see a migration of Palestinian Christians or Arab Israelis in general back into the Palestinian territories [and out of Israel]?

I wouldn't be able to answer the occupied, you know- the occupied territories much. But I think, from over here, if there was a just Palestinian state, with a good authority, and… and justice inside Israel towards the Arab community- you know, giving everybody the same opportunities- I think people wouldn't have a reason to say we want to leave. And, you know, what's promising is a lot of the people like me that left, and even left way before me and found a job in high tech and worked for a while, they've been coming back. So that's promising.

Do you frequently follow developments in the occupied territories, politically, with the P.A. and everything?

Just with the news. Over the news, yeah. But not on a daily basis.

Do you feel that that's the same with most of the population in Nazareth?

… Uh… some do more, some do a lot less, some even don't care. I know that for a fact. But how do you not care, basically? [CHUCKLES] Uh… I follow in my own ways. And there's people, always- . You know… you have to know Arabs. Arabs like to discuss politics. Every time you get into a gathering they don't discuss the weather, they don't discuss the football team. They discuss politics. So, mostly in the state of Israel Arabs discuss local politics more than politics of the West Bank. But you find groups and political activists that work more and try to address the West Bank issues more.

So in those discussions about local politics within the municipalities and everything, what's the-

Not just the municipalities. They're local as in the Arab members of Knesset who represent, you know- there's a Communist party, there's a Muslim party, there's a socialist party. So, it depends on who's side you're on and all that.

What do you think is the most frequent topic when they're talking about the local politics?

Uh… you know, everything there's an issue. Might be how Israel is doing this or they're doing that or sometimes how the U.S. is, you know, putting their nose in Syria and Iran and, you know, want to have a war there, too. So everybody has their own opinion. It depends on what news channel they watch, you know. They watch al-Jazeera a lot, so, you know, I think that some people don't watch the, the Jewish state run news line, so they get that opinion. I think it's whatever news you watch, that's your opinion. You know, people begin to go that way.

Is there much discussion or local opinion on the building of the wall?

There is always, I mean, not much. You know, as I say it's continuous. But there's people concerned. There are people from here that went and demonstrated against the wall. Uh… some people, uh… don't really care and some people who care so, you know, we have some people we have do presentations over here. Sabeel invited some people to do presentations. And they saw how much affect it's having on people's lives over there and that would change people's minds. But I think unless people take them there and show what it's doing… they, they just don't bother,

yeah. You got to understand, people over here they have families to raise, they have their own political issues in here and all that. When they have time they talk about other issues. But only, you know…

There are enough issues they're dealing with on the local-

Yeah. Yes. You know, then you have your kids and now it's exam times- final exams. You know, this kid isn't studying enough. [CHUCKLES] So, you know, it's… it's that environment. Like me. I have two jobs right now because I have my business and I started my own start up company and I got my wife working a half job and I have three kids who have final exams. You know, so unless I'm sitting down- because I'm sitting down here discussing politics with you- I wouldn't be discussing it at this time. I've got [LAUGHING] other issues- .

Other things you've got to take care of, yeah.

Yep. [LAUGHING]

Um, one final question- and I think you've already answered it to an extent, but so as to answer it expressly- if someone was to ask you to identify yourself, what would you say?

I said that be before and I will say it again-

Yep.

I'm Palestinian Arab Christian that holds an Israeli passport. Yeah. I'm also happening to have an American citizenship, so I'm duel citizen. But, um… the Palestinian Christian, that's very important for me. As only to defy. I also look at myself, more important for me because of my belief- the Christian part. But almost equal part as being Palestinian- being an Arab. **Then** American and, and Israeli. That's secondary for me.

Appendix B:

"Saint George and the Dragon"

NOTE: *The following is the complete text from a hand-out distributed to the audience of a "peace vigil" held at the Aida Refugee Camp, near Bethlehem, on 9 June 2007. The skit was performed by children from one of the local schools.*

9 June 2007
"Saint George and the Dragon"

A group of peasants from the Bethlehem area are plowing their yards. Although it is not an easy life, they are enjoying it very much. They consider their yards as their homes and source of survival and security.

Suddenly, a dragon (the Wall) attacks them and the peasants are too terrified. They can't breathe anymore, neither can they move freely. However, the dragon starts demolishing their houses and expropriating their lands.

The peasants feel lonely, powerless, and hopeless. They realize that there is nothing else to do but to pray for God to send his soldier St. George (al-Khader), the protector of the weak.

Al-Khader appears on a donkey, holding an olive branch. Al-Khader fights the dragon and eventually is able to defeat it and brings back the joy to the peasants. The peasants celebrate their freedom and liberation.

Scene 1: *Peasant's Life*
Men are plowing the ground while women are helping by preparing the meal, bringing jars of water, trays of food. They are sitting and sharing food together.

Scene 2: *Coming of the Dragon*
Dragon comes in a snaking way. It surrounds the peasants. They are terrified, try to escape and push the dragon away. However, the dragon surrounds them.

Scene 3: *Demolishing Houses and Expropriating Lands, Building Settlements*
Peasants are building their homes. The dragon attacks them a few blocks from the peasant's land as he is building settlements.
(Repeated two times: it represents the Naqba*, the expulsion and dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes and lands in 1948. It also represents the* Naksa*, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967)*
The peasants are homeless, sad and tired. The dragon is uprooting the peasants from their homeland.

Scene 4: *Wishes and Prayer to God for Protection*
Out of their despair the peasants decide to console one another and count on the mercy of God. One night, they all gather for a prayer.

Scene 5: *Al-Khader Fighting the Dragon*
Al-Khader comes on a donkey holding an olive branch in his hand. Al-Khader and the dragon are fighting. The dragon is defeated.

Scene 6: *The Peasants are Happy and Celebrating Freedom*
Peasants are happy that the dragon is defeated so they can have their normal life back again.

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